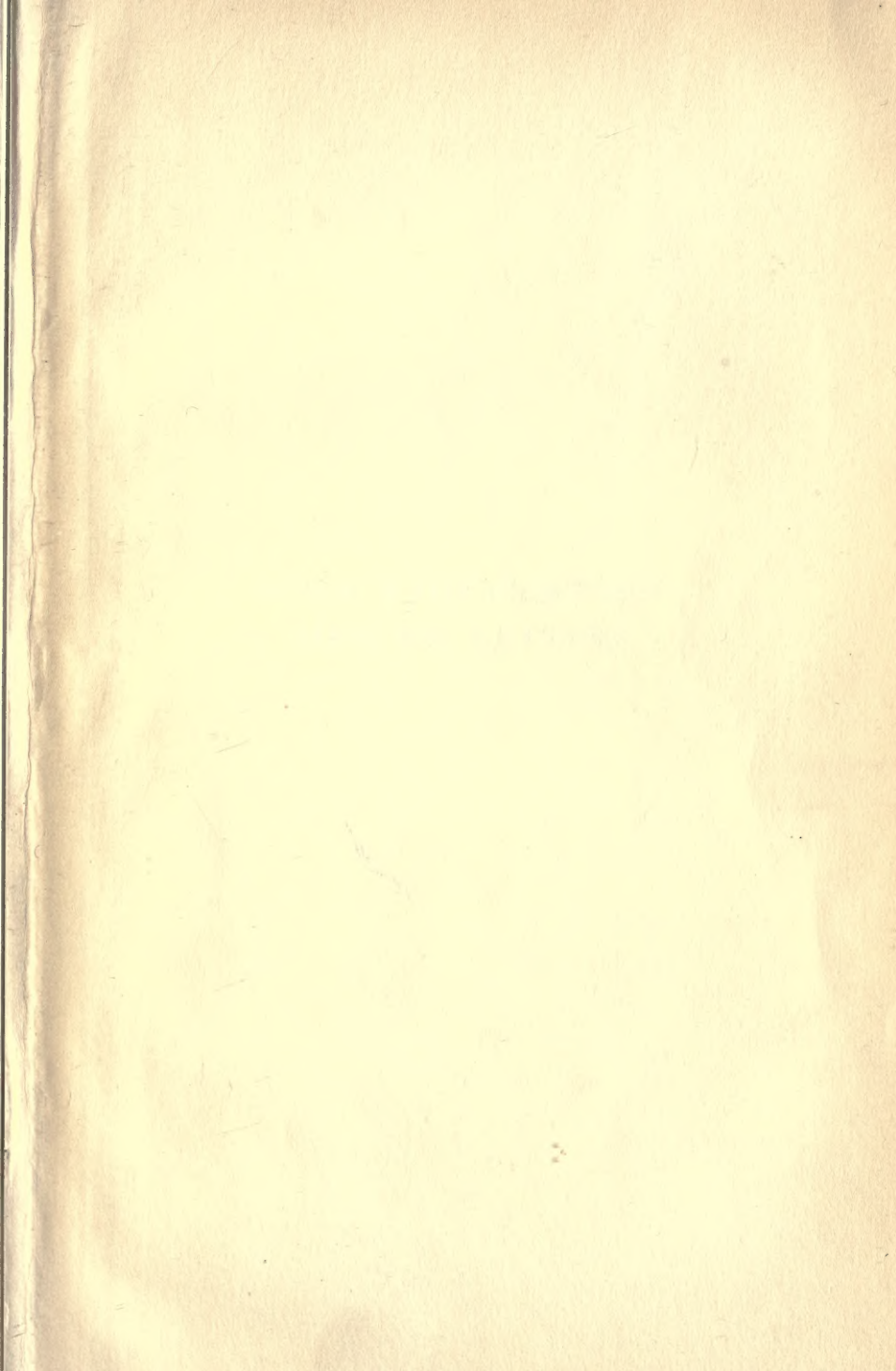
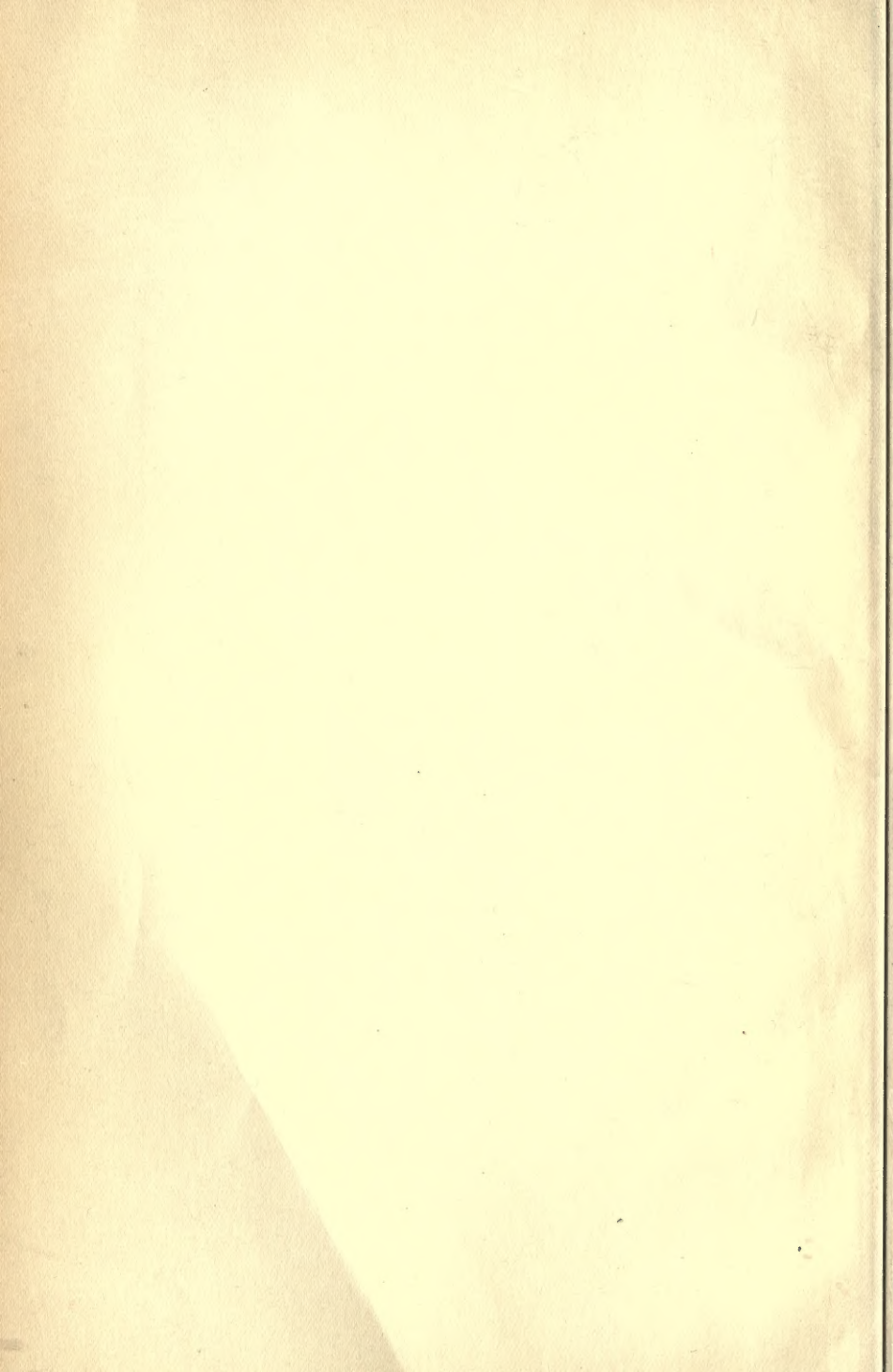


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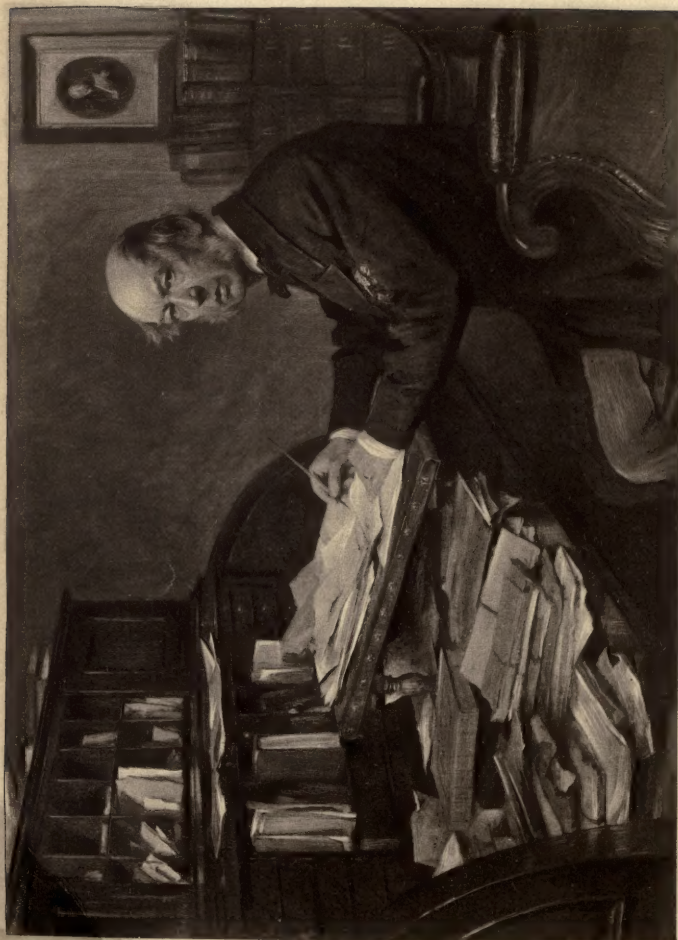
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SOME XVIII CENTURY
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MEN OF LETTERS

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Sir George Murray, P.R.S., A. G. G. G.

John Murray.

Walter Scott, P.R.S., A. G. G. G.

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SOME XVIII CENTURY MEN OF LETTERS

BIOGRAPHICAL ESSAYS BY
THE REV WHITWELL ELWIN
SOME TIME EDITOR OF THE
QUARTERLY REVIEW
WITH A MEMOIR

EDITED BY HIS SON
WARWICK ELWIN

VOL II

STERNE—FIELDING—
GOLDSMITH—BOSWELL AND DR. JOHNSON—
GRAY

WITH PORTRAITS, ETC.

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STERNE

"STERNE" appeared in the Quarterly Review for March, 1854. It was the first of Whitwell Elwin's larger contributions of combined biography and criticism after his writing had become entirely independent of Lockhart.¹ At a later period it was proposed to publish the essay separately, and with this view the author began to revise it, and somewhat increased the quotations. The revision had besides only touched a few passages of criticism, and had not yet extended to the biographical portion, when the task was laid aside and never resumed. Most of the additions, and such corrections as were made, are incorporated in the present reprint. The only omission is a page of introductory matter on the spurious work called the Koran, the title of which was placed at the head of the article.

The edition of Sterne's Works which Elwin used was that of 1798, in ten volumes. The references appended in the notes are to this. In the case of Tristram Shandy the volumes and chapters are those of the original issue.

¹ See *Memoir*, chap. iv.

STERNE

NOTHING is related of the family of Sterne's mother, except that her step-father, Mr. Nuttle, was of Irish extraction. That one or both of her own parents were of the same nation is in the highest degree probable from the Hibernian disposition that predominated in the character of her celebrated son. Roger, his father, who was the grandson of Richard Sterne, Archbishop of York, entered the army during Marlborough's campaigns. Of this army Mr. Nuttle was a sutler, and Lieutenant Sterne, having got into debt to him, propitiated his creditor by marrying the step-daughter, who was a widow. Laurence was their second child. He was born at Clonmel, the residence of the Nuttles, November 24th, 1713, a few days after his parents had arrived there from Dunkirk, in consequence of the peace of Utrecht. The regiment of the lieutenant, whose commission was his fortune, was now disbanded, and until it was again re-established ten months later, he was compelled to quarter himself and his family upon his mother, who, as the daughter and heiress of Sir Roger Jaques, possessed the seat of Elvington, near York. Unfortunately those who wore the king's colours had incessantly to traverse the king's highway. From Elvington the lieutenant was ordered to Dublin. From thence in a month he was sent to Exeter, and in another twelve-month back again to Dublin. Here the hopeful soldier, who was transplanted every season, expected to take root. He furnished a large house, spent a vast deal of money in a short space of time, and had then to break up his estab-

lishment, which would doubtless otherwise have broken him, to join the Vigo expedition in the Isle of Wight. On his return his life was the same perpetual march as before, and in this removal from place to place his family were exposed to many dangers and hardships. These they shared with hundreds of the inglorious dead. The material circumstance is that, till he was ten years old, the author of *Tristram Shandy* lived a soldier's life—that his earliest world was the barrack yard, his earliest knowledge feats of arms, and that his earliest steps were made to the sound of fife and drum. The self-sown seed, dropped by chance and abandoned to nature, long overlooked, or only seen to be despised, often produces the noblest growth. The heroes of Blenheim, Ramillies, and Malplaquet, who entranced the little boy with their enthusiastic tales, could never have suspected that they were training a genius who would rival in letters the renown of Marlborough in arms.

When little Laurence was in his eighth year he fell under the water-wheel of a mill while it was going, and was taken out unhurt. The event occurred at Wicklow, and the country people flocked by hundreds to look at him—a truly Irish act—as if there could be anything to see in a child, whose sole peculiarity was to have had a narrow escape. In the autumn of 1723, or the spring of 1724, when the lieutenant and his regiment were quartered at Carrickfergus, Laurence was removed from the tutorship of Marlborough's veterans, and sent to school at Halifax. In the brief memoir of himself, which is the principal authority for his life, he omits to state where he spent his vacations; but the opportunity to revisit his old companions and haunts at all events ceased in 1727, for his father was aiding that year in the defence of Gibraltar, and never returned to England. He quarrelled about a goose with a Captain Phillips, was run through the body, had a struggle for life, was sent to Jamaica with an impaired constitution, took the yellow fever, lost his

senses, lingered on a harmless and complacent idiot for a couple of months, and then sat down quietly in an arm-chair and breathed his last in 1731. "He was," says Sterne, "a little smart man, active to the last degree in all exercises, most patient of fatigue and disappointments, of which it pleased God to give him full measure. He was in his temper somewhat rapid and hasty, but of a kindly, sweet disposition, void of all design, and so innocent in his own intentions that he suspected no one, so that you might have cheated him ten times in a day, if nine had not been sufficient for your purpose."¹ Nobody can doubt after this from what original Uncle Toby was drawn.

Sterne remained eight years at the Halifax school. He says that the master was able, and has furnished a proof that he was sagacious. The ceiling of the schoolroom had been newly whitewashed, and Sterne emblazoned his name in capital letters on the tempting tablet. He was severely flogged by the usher for defacing the work. The superior, however, resented the punishment, declaring that the name was that of a genius, and should never be erased.² It might have been expected that Sterne, in requital, would have recorded, with the anecdote, the name of the master who had done him such homage.

Sterne states that his cousin, the heir of Elvington, became a father to him, and sent him, in 1733, to Jesus College, Cambridge. There he formed a friendship, which lasted his life, with Hall-Stevenson, the infamous author of *Crazy Tales*, and other doggrel ribaldry. The alliance seems to have been cemented by degrading sympathies, and chiefly by a propensity to laugh at topics which would have raised a blush with saner minds. A worthy companion would have done his utmost to persuade the author of *Tristram Shandy* to strain out the impurities from his rich-flavoured humour, but Stevenson incited him to stir up the lees.

¹ [*Autobiographical Memoir, Works*, vol. i. p. xiv.]

² [*Ibid.*]

On leaving Cambridge, in 1736, Sterne entered into Orders, and his uncle Jaques Sterne, a pluralist with two prebendaries and two rectories, got him presented to the living of Sutton, in Yorkshire. At York he fell in love with his future wife, who thought their joint stocks insufficient for their comfort, and declined a present engagement. In the meanwhile she went to reside with a sister in Staffordshire. Four of the letters he addressed to her in her absence have been preserved, and, though they are artificial, rhapsodical compositions, they are strongly marked with the peculiarities of his maturer style. The lady returned to York, and nearly died of a consumption. "My dear Laurey," she said to him one evening, when he was sitting by her side with an almost broken heart, "I can never be yours, for I verily believe I have not long to live; but I have left you every shilling of my fortune."¹ On her recovery she consented to make two lovers unhappy, and they were married in 1741. Whatever else may have tried their patience, they were not exposed to the misery which Mrs. Sterne apprehended of straitened circumstances. A friend of her own performed a promise he had made her of presenting her husband, if she married a Yorkshire clergyman, to the living of Stillington, which was luckily in the neighbourhood of Sterne's previous preferment, and his pluralist uncle, about the same time, had interest to get him appointed a prebendary of York. "I thank God," he wrote in 1760, "though I don't abound, that I have enough for a clean shirt every day, and a mutton chop; and my contentment with this has thus far, and I hope ever will, put me above stooping an inch for it."² Sterne was prodigal of money, and it was no contemptible income which purchased him shirts, chops, and contentment.

From the love epistles of his youth up to the eve of the publication of *Tristram Shandy*—a period of twenty years—not a single fragment of Sterne's correspondence

¹ [*Autobiography*, p. xv.]

² [Letter vi.]

appears to have been kept by any one of his connexions, which is much the same as to say that none of them suspected his genius, or anticipated that he would ever make a noise in the world. Throughout this long period he resided at Sutton, where his amusements, he tells us, were books, painting, fiddling, and shooting.¹ His duties we may assume, without much want of charity, were confined to reading prayers and preaching on Sundays.

At the ripe age of forty-five he commenced Tristram Shandy. He had previously printed a couple of sermons—one preached for a charity school in 1747, the other at York assizes in 1750—and he is supposed to have written politics, in the Whig interest, at the instigation of his uncle. They quarrelled, however, at last, because, as Sterne asserts in his *Memoirs*, he refused to pen party paragraphs in the newspapers, an employment he thought beneath him.² An earlier account, which he gives in a letter while Tristram was in progress, presents his conduct in a different light. He there states that he was tired of employing his brains for other people's advantage—"a foolish sacrifice," he added, "which I have made for some years to an ungrateful person."³ Hence it would appear that he exerted his pen for years in his uncle's service, and only desisted because he had failed to reap the advantages he expected. Whatever was the nature of these occasional productions, they were not such as Sterne was ambitious to own after his reputation was established. Like many other authors, he was long in discovering the real bent of his genius, and detected it suddenly at last. Even then he was ignorant of the full compass of his powers. He had produced at the outset a single tender scene; but, in spite of the pathos of the death of Yorick, it was upon his humour alone that he laid any stress, and it was not until he had got into the third instalment of his work that he learnt that he was possessed of a second string to his bow.

¹ [*Autobiography*, p. xvi.]

² [*Ibid.*]

³ [Nov. 19, 1759, Letter v.]

In January, 1760, the first two volumes of *Tristram Shandy* were published, and had a signal success. "At present," wrote Horace Walpole, in April, "nothing is talked of, nothing admired, but what I cannot help calling a very insipid and tedious performance: it is a kind of novel, called *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, the great humour of which consists in the whole narration always going backwards. It makes one smile two or three times at the beginning, but in recompense makes one yawn for two hours. The characters are tolerably kept up, but the humour is for ever attempted and missed."¹ The fastidious critic who thought *Tristram Shandy* vapid, could discover a vast deal of original wit in the flat and feeble verses of Stevenson, and protested that he should not have been so sick of authors if they had all possessed the parts and good sense of this licentious rhymester. It was generally the geese that were Walpole's swans. Love is not more blind to defects than envy is to merit, and all the geniuses of the age, who did not belong to his set, were regularly enrolled in the *Dunciad* of Strawberry Hill. Great, indeed, must have been the triumph which was acknowledged by this drawing-room Diogenes to be complete. "The Town," says Gray, in a letter of the same month, "are reading the King of Prussia's poetry. . . . *Tristram Shandy* is still a greater object of admiration, the man as well as the book. One is invited to dinner, where he dines, a fortnight beforehand."² According to the testimony of Walpole, the effect of so much popularity and attention was to turn quite topsy-turvy a head which was a little turned before.³

Sterne said that he wrote not "to be fed, but to be famous."⁴ His gains nevertheless were unusually large. He received 700*l.* for a second edition of his first two

¹ [To Sir David Dalrymple, April 4, 1760, Walpole's *Letters*, ed. Cunningham, vol. iii. p. 298.]

² [Gray to Dr. Wharton, April 20, 1760, *Works*, ed. 1835, vol iii. p. 241.]

³ [Walpole's *Letters*, vol. iii. p. 298.]

⁴ [Letter vi.]

diminutive volumes, and for the copyright of two more which were not yet begun. Just then Lord Fauconberg presented him with the living of Coxwold, and it was inferred that it was a testimony of the patron's estimation of Tristram Shandy. The imputation of bestowing so incongruous a reward was undeserved, for Sterne states in a letter that the preferment was a return for some service he had rendered.¹ Another report which gained general belief was that Warburton, in the fervour of his admiration, had sent him a purse full of gold.² Shortly afterwards it was asserted that Sterne had formed a design of satirising the author of the *Divine Legation*, under the guise of tutor to Tristram, and that the bishop in alarm had paid the money to be spared the ridicule. The story in all its parts was a fiction, and Sterne wrote a letter to Garrick, which was evidently intended to be shown to Warburton, in which he expressed with affected extravagance great concern at the calumny, and great admiration of the bishop.³ The bishop replied that he was pleased to find that he had no reason to change his opinion of so original a writer, that he prided himself on having warmly recommended Tristram Shandy to all the best company in town, that he had been accused in a grave assembly as a particular patroniser of the work, and had pleaded guilty to the charge, and that if his enemies had been joined by the author, he believed the latter would have been grieved to find himself associated with "a crew of the most egregious blockheads that ever abused the blessing of pen and ink."⁴ Walpole relates that Warburton especially eulogised the book to his episcopal brethren, and told them that Sterne was the English Rabelais. The bishops, adds Horace, had never heard of such a writer.⁵ It is an obvious retort to this contemptuous pleasantry that it is just as well to be ignorant of works of genius as

¹ [Letter xix.]² [Letter ix.]³ [Letter vii.]⁴ [Warburton to Garrick, March 7, 1860.]⁵ [Walpole's *Letters*, vol. iii. p. 298.]

to read them, as Walpole did *Tristram Shandy*, and be insensible to their merits.

Warburton soon saw cause to withdraw his countenance. In a reputed letter of Sterne, but which is of doubtful authenticity, it is related that he remarked to a brother clergyman, who had read *Tristram Shandy* in manuscript, that he meant in correcting it to consider the colour of his cloth, and that the clergyman rejoined that with such an idea in his head he would render the book not worth a groat.¹ Whether the conversation passed or not, Sterne acted on the opinion ascribed to his friend. Too much of his wit is the phosphoric light emitted by corruption. Amidst the applause which greeted his volumes, an outcry was raised in consequence against the indecorum of parts, while the author affirmed in his defence that the very passages excepted against were those best relished by sound critics, which showed him, he said, the folly of mutilating his book to please prudish individuals.² No sooner had he made, through Garrick, the acquaintance of Warburton, than the bishop backed up the representations of the objectors, and repeatedly warned him against any renewed "violations of decency and good manners."³ Sterne professed to thank him for the advice,⁴ though he had probably no intention of profiting by it. His life in London was an unceasing round of levity and dissipation, and Warburton wrote to Garrick, in June, "I heard enough of his conduct there since I left to make me think he would soon lose the fruits of all the advantage he had gained by a successful effort, and would disable me from appearing as his friend and well-wisher." A few weeks before, two wicked and nonsensical poems, which Gray called "absolute madness,"⁵ and of which the first is entitled "To My Cousin Shandy on his coming to Town," issued from the shop of the publisher of *Tristram*. They were notoriously written by Hall-Stevenson, the bosom

¹ [Letter cxxxi.] ² [Letter vi.] ³ [Letter xi.] ⁴ [Letter x.]

⁵ [Gray to Wharton, *Works*, vol. iii. p. 241.]

friend of Sterne, who had as notoriously approved them. With an effrontery, it is to be hoped unparalleled in the history of English divinity, he now followed up his volumes of *Tristram* with two volumes of *Sermons*, and presented a copy to Warburton. The bishop seized the opportunity to send him a final letter of remonstrance, full of the most cutting and artful sarcasm. Sterne had complained in the note which accompanied the sermons that the scribblers used him ill.¹ The bishop agrees that they are the pest of the public, and as an instance of their profligacy quotes their conduct with respect to the poems of Stevenson: "Whoever was the author, he appears to be a monster of impiety and lewdness. Yet, such is the malignity of the scribblers, some have given them to your friend Hall, and others, which is still more impossible, to yourself, though the first ode has the insolence to place you both in a mean and a ridiculous light. But this might arise from a tale equally groundless and malignant, that you had shown them to your acquaintances in MS. before they were given to the public. Nor was their being printed by Dodsley the likeliest means of discrediting the calumny."

Not less admirable is his reproof of Sterne, under the veil of a panegyric upon Garrick, for his spendthrift habits, his presuming on his present popularity, and his companionship with dissolute men of rank: "But of all these things I dare say Mr. Garrick, whose prudence is equal to his honesty or his talents, has remonstrated to you with the freedom of a friend. He knows the inconstancy of what is called the Public towards all, even the best intentioned, of those who contribute to its pleasure or amusement. He, as every man of *honour* and *discretion* would, has availed himself of the public favour to regulate the taste, and, in his proper station, to reform the manners of the fashionable world, while, by a well-judged economy, he has provided against the temptations of a mean and servile dependency on the follies and vices of the great."²

¹ [Letter x.]

² [Letter xi.]

"I have done my best," said the bishop, on forwarding a copy of the letter to Garrick, "to prevent his playing the fool in a worse sense than I have the charity to think he intends. I esteemed him as a man of genius, and am desirous he would enable me to esteem him as a clergyman." He proceeded on the contrary from bad to worse, and eighteen months afterwards the arrogant bishop, whose invectives had often no better warrant than his passions, pronounced him with reason "an irrecoverable scoundrel."¹ While still paying court to him, Sterne announced his intention of showing the world in the progress of his story "the honour and respect" in which he held "so great a man."² Henceforth he abandoned the effort to conciliate him, and though he commemorated him in the final volume of *Tristram Shandy*, it was in a manner that, considering the protest of the bishop against the licentiousness of the work, seems rather intended to be offensive than flattering. "What," he says, "has this book done more than the Legation of Moses, or the Tale of a Tub, that it may not swim down the gutter of Time along with them?"³ "The gutter of Time" is a suitable expression for the viler parts of Swift and Sterne, but Warburton hoped to sail upon the stream.

The Assize Sermon of 1750, which was printed separately at the time, and found, as the author tells us, "neither purchasers nor readers,"⁴ was much admired when he inserted it in the second volume of *Tristram*, where, besides its intrinsic merits, it was largely set off by the interlocutory comments of the Shandys, Slop, and Corporal Trim. Horace Walpole asserted that it was "the best thing in the book."⁵ The reader was told that, if he liked the sample, a set of similar discourses were at the service of the world,⁶ and the interpolation of the specimen

¹ [To Hurd, 1761, *Letters of an Eminent Prelate*, p. 335.]

² [To Garrick, Letter vii.]

³ [*Tristram Shandy*, vol. ix. chap. viii.]

⁴ [Preface to Sermons, *Works*, vol. vi.]

⁵ [Walpole's *Letters*, vol. iii. p. 298.]

⁶ [*Tristram Shandy*, vol. ii. chap. xvii.]

was, in fact, a cunning contrivance of Sterne by which to connect his sermons with the anticipated popularity of Tristram Shandy, and turn to account a quantity of unsaleable goods which had been long upon his hands. They appeared in June, 1760, with a double title-page, the first purporting that they were by Mr. Yorick, to "serve the purpose of the bookseller"; the second, with the real name of the author, to "ease," he said, "the minds of those who see a jest, and the danger which lurks under it, where no jest was meant."¹ Though he might think it prudent to insert this saving sentence, he had been careful, when drawing his own character in that of Yorick, to intimate that he selected the name as significant of his disposition,² and it is equally apparent from many passages in his letters that he was prouder of his cap and bells than of his gown.

After a season of five months in London, during which he was the rage, he went into the country to prepare a fresh portion of Tristram Shandy for the ensuing winter. He fixed his residence at Coxwold, which he describes as "a sweet retirement in comparison of Sutton."³ The value of his new living was a hundred guineas a year, but the clear addition to his income was only seventy, he being now obliged to hire a substitute for Stillington and Sutton.⁴ From this we learn incidentally that the stipend of a Yorkshire curate, who had the sole spiritual charge of two parishes, was, in 1760, thirty guineas per annum, or twelve shillings a week. The wages of a labourer at the same period were from eight to nine shillings. But the curates of that day were commonly inferior, both in descent and education, to the beneficed clergy, and the clergy again in the north much below those of the other parts of the kingdom. The poor parson in Tristram Shandy, as in the novels of Fielding, spends

¹ [Preface, *Works*, vol. vi.]

² [*Tristram Shandy*, vol. i. chap. xi.]

³ [*Autobiography*, vol. i. p. xvii.]

⁴ [Letter xix.]

his evening at the village ale-house, where the company, congenial to his plebeian tastes, must have been the attraction, or he would have smoked his pipe and sipped his beer by his own fireside.

At the beginning of August Sterne had completed his third volume, and before Christmas its companion was off his desk. He hastened up to London with the manuscript, and had a second season of festivities more triumphant than the first. He tells his correspondents that he had not dined at home since he arrived, that he was committed to fourteen dinners in advance, that the invitations were more likely to increase than to diminish, and that where he had one friend last year who paid him honour he had three at present.¹ The invitations did, indeed, multiply at such a rate that, as Dr. Johnson had heard, he had at one time engagements for three months.² "As to the main points in view, at which you hint," Sterne writes in the midst of this homage to one of his Stillington parishioners, Mr. Croft, "all I can say is that I see my way, and, unless Old Nick throws the dice, shall, in due time, come off winner."³ The "main point" of all, at which he aimed, was to rise in the Church, and, incredible as it may sound, his friends had even hopes that he might obtain a mitre.⁴ For this doubtless he trusted to his interest with his aristocratic companions. He had paid court to Mr. Pitt, apparently without success, by dedicating to him the two first volumes of *Tristram Shandy*,⁵ but though the Great Commoner would not stoop to patronise him, he was on familiar terms with Charles Townshend,

¹ [Letters xiv., xvi.]

² [Boswell's *Johnson*, Croker's ed., p. 253.]

³ [Letter xiv.]

⁴ [*Tristram Shandy*, vol. i. chap. xii. Hall-Stevenson's *Zachary's Tale*:—"I hope that Tristram's writing will be rewarded with a mitre"; Ferriar's *Sterne*, vol. i. p. 83.]

⁵ In a letter from Paris (January 31, 1762), Sterne mentions that Mr. Pitt "has behaved to him in every respect like a man of good breeding and good nature" [Letter xx.]; but this refers merely to some trifling civility, which was doubtless asked and could not be refused, for facilitating Yorick's intercourse abroad.

Lord Rockingham, and other influential political personages. Whatever his chances of becoming a dignitary of the Church might otherwise have been, an event fatal to his prospects had recently occurred. On the 25th of October, 1760, George III. ascended the throne. Sterne was among the first to record the reformation which ensued at court. "The king seems resolved," he wrote on Christmas Day, 1760, "to bring all things back to their original principles, and to stop the torrent of corruption and laziness. . . . He gives everything himself, knows everything, and weighs everything maturely, and then is inflexible. This puts old stagers off their game. How it will end we are all in the dark."¹ He was so much in the dark that he had as yet no suspicion that one result of the change was to put a gulf between the bench and men like him. On a false rumour being propagated at York that he was forbid the court, he said that he had the honour to stand so well with men of the first rank who were about the throne, that he feared no accident of the kind.² The previous year he had been much noticed by the Duke of York,³ who was a very convivial personage, and he had contrived a niche both for him and the king in the present issue of *Tristram Shandy*. "Fanciful and extravagant as I may appear to the world in my opinion of christian names," he makes the elder Mr. Shandy say, "and of that magic bias which good or bad names irresistibly impress upon our characters and conduct, heaven is witness that, in the warmest transports of my wishes for the prosperity of my child, I never once wished to crown his head with more glory and honour than what GEORGE or EDWARD would have spread around it."⁴ But neither his own graceful compliments, nor the influence of his friends, if it had ever been exerted, would have induced George III. to commit the sacrilege of promoting Sterne. He who,

¹ [Letter xiii.]² [Letter xvi.]³ [Letter ix.]⁴ [*Tristram Shandy*, vol. iv. chap. viii.]

twelve years later, wrote to Archbishop Cornwallis to reprove him for giving routs, and to insist upon their instant suppression, "as levities and vain dissipations, utterly inexpedient, if not unlawful, to pass in a residence for many centuries devoted to divine studies, religious retirement, and the extensive exercise of charity and benevolence,"¹ would certainly not have been less resolute than Queen Anne in refusing to adopt the Rabelais of his reign.

Mirth was the only emotion which Sterne attempted to raise in his new volumes. His own opinion of them was high. "I think," he said, "there is more laughable humour, with an equal degree of Cervantic satire, if not more, than in the last."² Some of his noble patrons, who were admitted to a private view, and whom he describes as "of the first magnitude, both as to wit and station,"³ prognosticated success. He expected as a set-off to be pelted either from cellars or garrets—that is, to be attacked by all the poor authors who could not afford, like himself, to rent apartments in Bond Street upon the first floor, and who were often doubtful of a crust of bread for their dinner, while he himself was pledged, three months deep, to eat venison and drink burgundy with the peers and ministers of state who scrambled for him. The tenant of the garret was envious of the prosperous gentleman in the parlour, and the parlour lodger had a stately contempt for the indigent dweller above. In addition to hostile critics, experience had taught Sterne to expect a party of the public to be against him—people "who do not, or will not, laugh," but he avowed he should be contented if he could "divide the world."⁴ The volumes were published on the 20th of January, and, according to his own account, the result at first was much what he predicted. "One half of the town abuse my book as bitterly as the other half cry it up to the skies. The best is, they

¹ [Nichols's *Literary Anecdotes*.]

³ [Letter xiv.]

² [Letter xii.]

⁴ [Letter xiii.]

abuse and buy it, and at such a rate, that we are going on with a second edition as fast as possible.”¹ Horace Walpole, who can only be heard as evidence on the sentiments of the opposition, thus professes to sum up the general opinion, on the 7th of March. “The second and third volumes of *Tristram Shandy*, the dregs of nonsense, have universally met the contempt they deserve: genius may be exhausted;—I see that folly’s invention may be so too.”² They were in reality thought a falling off, but, though the proportion of folly was larger than before, they contained some of the author’s happiest scenes.

At the end of July, 1761, the truant pastor got back to his parsonage, and immediately set to work to furnish his annual Christmas fare. He had become conscious that the adverse tide had gathered strength, but he announced to his friend Stevenson his resolution to follow the whims of his own mind, and set his censors at defiance. “I am very valorous,” he said, “and ’tis in proportion as we retire from the world, and see it in its true dimensions, that we despise it,—no bad rant!”³ It was rant, indeed, for a man to talk of despising the world, who was fresh from devoting an unbroken seven months to the pursuit of its frivolities, and who, in the very letter which contained the vaunt, was bemoaning his retirement and wishing himself back to town.⁴ He despised the world when the world was against him, but in everything in which he could obtain its favours it had no more obedient servant. The continuation of *Tristram* soon dissipated his discontent. He was one of the authors who gloated over his own conceptions, and who always thought his latest production his masterpiece. He had none of the painful misgivings which relax the energies and fret the minds of diffident men, and the very act of composition was therefore a

¹ [Letter xv.]

² [To Rev. H. Zouch, Walpole’s *Letters*, vol. iii. p. 382.]

³ [Letter xviii.]

⁴ [*Ibid.*]

delight. He said now that to write was his hobby, that he should continue it while he lived, that he was charmed with Uncle Toby's imaginary character, and, as usual, expressed his conviction that the volumes on which he was engaged were his best. "My Lydia helps to copy for me, and my wife knits, and listens as I read her chapters."¹ "My Lydia," his only child, was then a girl of fourteen, and that he set her to copy *Tristram Shandy* is a proof at once that he believed it innocent, and that every feeling of decorum was dead within him. Whoever is fresh from the perusal of the book, and recalls the scene that was passing in this country parsonage—the clergyman of the parish composing the work, his daughter transcribing, his wife hearing and applauding it—will at least agree that the proceeding was neither clerical nor feminine.

The matchless story of *Le Fever*, in the sixth volume of *Tristram Shandy*, gave a fresh impulse to the popularity of Sterne. The jest was growing stale, and would scarcely have served for a third season, but the introduction of the pathetic element renewed in some degree the original excitement. At the same time that he varied his style he had the advantage of exhibiting his personal qualities to a new circle of acquaintances, having shifted his stage from London to Paris for the benefit of his health.

Sterne says that most of his father's babies were of a delicate frame, not made to last long.² Four out of seven died almost in infancy, and Laurence himself had the seeds of consumption inherent in his constitution. While an undergraduate at Cambridge a blood-vessel burst in his lungs, but he recovered his strength in the quiet of a country life, and for twenty years enjoyed comparative health. When his name was up in the world his malady returned, and he closed his fourth volume with a promise to reappear at the end of a twelvemonth

¹ [Letter xix.]

² [*Autobiography*, vol. i. p. xi.]

"unless his vile cough killed him in the mean time."¹ This catastrophe was not far from being realised. "I am very ill," he wrote in February, 1762, "having broke a vessel in my lungs. Hard writing in the summer, together with preaching, which I have not strength for, is ever fatal to me; but I cannot avoid the latter yet, and the former is too pleasurable to be given up."² The feverish existence which he led in London, the late hours, and the luxurious living, were a much more probable source of the evil.

Sterne commenced his seventh volume with an account of his malady. "Thou hast had a narrow escape," said Eugenius, which is the name given to Hall-Stevenson in *Tristram Shandy*. "As thou seest Death has got me by the throat (for Eugenius could scarce hear me speak across the table), and that I am no match for him in the open field, had I not better, whilst these few scattered spirits remain, and these two spider legs of mine are able to support me,—had I not better, Eugenius, fly for my life?" Eugenius advised it, and Tristram exclaims, that to escape the enemy he will gallop from place to place to the end of the world—"where, if Death follows me, I pray he may break his neck." "He runs more risk *there*," said Eugenius, "than thou." This hyperbolical prediction of a literary immortality which was to survive death and time, "brought blood into the cheek, from whence it had been some months banished," and, while still blushing from the compliment, Tristram bade adieu to Eugenius, and hastened (January, 1762) to Paris.³ It was the period when English literature and ideas were in vogue in France, and he found Tristram Shandy upon every table, and himself as much an object of attention as in London. A few days sufficed to re-establish his health, and we have the old story repeated of a fortnight's engagements to dinners and suppers.⁴

In addition to the importance which Sterne derived

¹ [*Tristram Shandy*, vol. iv. chap. xxxii.]

² [Letter xxi.]

³ [*Tristram Shandy*, vol. vii. chap. i.]

⁴ [Letter xx.]

from his reputation, it may be surmised that he was possessed of considerable powers of entertainment from the hold which, to the last, he kept upon society. No description has been handed down to us of his manners and conversation, but we learn from his own letters that his favourite vein was what he called "Shandeism," or the art of talking amusing nonsense.¹ There can be little question, to judge from his writings, that he was excellent, also, at telling a story, that he indulged largely in *doubles entendres*, and that his repartees were rather plays upon words than genuine wit. From the account he gives of Yorick, in *Tristram Shandy*, it appears he had made many enemies by his satirical sayings, and had been astonished that his victims should shrink from the edge, instead of being dazzled by the glitter, of the blade.² That, in his eagerness to sustain his character for humour, he was not very scrupulous as to the means, is apparent from an anecdote related by M. Dutens, who once sat next him at the table of our ambassador, Lord Tavistock, in Paris. The conversation turned upon Turin, where M. Dutens, though a Frenchman, had recently been the English *chargé d'affaires*. Sterne, ignorant whom he was addressing, asked him if he knew M. Dutens. The company laughed; and Sterne, imagining that some ludicrous associations connected with M. Dutens were the cause of the hilarity, inquired if he was not rather odd. "Quite an original," replied M. Dutens. "I thought so," said Sterne, who immediately commenced telling several ridiculous traits of the *chargé d'affaires*, all of which were the coinage of his brain. The laughter which arose he mistook for a tribute to the comicality of his description, and entertained the circle for the rest of the evening with the absurdities of M. Dutens. When his butt retired, and Sterne was admitted into the secret, the guests pretended that the *chargé d'affaires*, though restrained at the moment by

¹ [Letters xyiii., xxii.]

² [*Tristram Shandy*, vol. i. chaps. xi., xii.]

respect for his host, was an irascible man, who would demand reparation in the morning. Sterne sought him out to avert his anger, begged his pardon, pleaded in excuse the desire he felt to amuse the company, embraced him warmly, and requested the honour of his friendship.¹ If the scene was not in other respects very creditable to Sterne, the praise of a fertile and ready invention, in extemporising the imaginary eccentricities of M. Dutens, must at least be conceded to him.

The species of rhapsodical humour which he cultivated, bordering upon buffoonery, and often doubtless degenerating into it altogether, implied a fund of animal spirits. "Every object," wrote one of his French friends, M. Tollot, "is *couleur de rose* for this happy mortal, and things which would appear to the rest of the world under a sorrowful and gloomy aspect, assume in his eyes a gay and smiling face. His sole pursuit is pleasure, and, unlike others who, when they have attained their wish, can no longer enjoy it, he drains the bowl to the last drop."² "As for my spirits," he says himself, in *Tristram Shandy*, "little have I to lay to their charge; nay, so very little (unless the mounting me upon a long stick, and playing the fool with me nineteen hours out of the twenty-four, be accusations), that, on the contrary, I have much, much to thank them for. Cheerily have ye made me tread the path of life with all the burdens of it (except its cares) upon my back: in no one moment of my existence, that I remember, have ye once deserted me, or tinged the objects which came in my way either with sable or with a sickly green: in dangers ye gilded my horizon with hope; and, when Death himself knocked at my door, ye bad him come again; and in so gay a tone of careless indifference did ye do it, that he doubted of his commission."³ Swift's exclamation, "*Vive la bagatelle*," was the forced effort of a

¹ [Dutens, *Mémoires d'un Voyageur*, t. i. pp. 165-167.]

² [*Seven Letters by Sterne and his Friends*, 1844.]

³ [*Tristram Shandy*, vol. vii. chap. i.]

man doomed to hopeless melancholy, and who trifled to avert despair; with Sterne it was the true reflection of his temperament. The spirit of Shandeism within him would never, he said, suffer him to think for two moments together upon any grave subject.¹ Hair-brained, light-hearted, and sanguine—pleased with himself, his follies, and his vices—he treated misfortune when it came as a passing guest, and even extracted amusement from it while it stayed. His merriment savoured more of epicurean joviality than of a well-ordered cheerfulness, and its ceaseless flow must have deprived it of half its merit and its charm; for any single emotion, however excellent in itself, which absorbs the mind to the exclusion of all other qualities, gives us, instead of the *sapiens teres atque rotundus*, only the fragment of a man. No one could read his own account of the endless frivolities, which would never suffer him to think upon a serious subject, or engage in any pursuit except pleasure, without feeling that his mirth belonged to that description of laughter, of which Solomon said that it was “mad.”²

The joyous philosophy of poor Yorick was often put to the test. He relates, in the dedication to Tristram Shandy, that he fenced by mirth against the infirmities of ill health, persuaded that every time a man laughed he added something to his fragment of life. At Paris he laughed till he cried, and believed that his lungs had

¹ [Letter xviii.]

² [Eccles. ii. 2. “With all his brightness of mind, he was, as Mr. de Grey told Lichtenberg, ‘a very troublesome visitor.’ ‘He often came to a house at nine in the morning and seldom left till nine at night. If the family went out, he accompanied them, and returned with them.’ His prolonged visits were the more fatiguing from his garrulous egotism. He liked, says Lichtenberg, to usurp the conversation, and talk of himself; and the reason why it was impossible to get rid of him was his belief that his society could not fail to be agreeable. There was a further drawback—which Lichtenberg heard on unexceptionable authority. His grovelling character got the ascendancy over his talents, and he was especially offensive from his propensity for playing mean practical jokes.”—MS. note by Whitwell Elwin in a copy of Boswell’s *Johnson*.]

benefited as much by the process as by the change of air.¹ When he had been there six months he brought up one night such a quantity of blood that his bed was full, and he nearly bled to death.² He was joined by his wife and daughter shortly afterwards, and (in July, 1762) they removed to Toulouse.³ Here, in August, he was seized with a fever, which left him for six weeks with scarce a hope of recovery. If his spirits ever forsook him, his letters show that they revived the instant the present danger was past. "I am now stout and foolish again as a happy man can wish to be," he adds, after giving an account of his fever, "and am busy playing the fool with my Uncle Toby, whom I have got soused over head and ears in love."⁴ The tone of society on the other side of the Channel encouraged him to assume a greater licence than ever in the new volumes he commenced. He had reached that point of hardihood in which he took a pride in shocking the scruples of the virtuous; and, having become acquainted at Paris with a French novelist more degraded than himself, the two worthies conceived a scheme, the jest of which was the excess of the impudence. He writes: "Crébillon has made a convention with me, which, if he is not too lazy, will be no bad *persiflage*. As soon as I get to Toulouse he has agreed to write me an expostulatory letter upon the indecorms of T. Shandy, which is to be answered by recrimination upon the liberties in his own works. These are to be printed together—Crébillon against Sterne—Sterne against Crébillon—the copy to be sold and the money equally divided. This is good Swiss policy."⁵

That Yorick the Jester should be utterly oblivious of the Rev. Mr. Yorick, prebendary of York, and vicar of Stillington, Sutton, and Coxwold, was too much a matter of course to excite surprise, but even the Jester, like the fool of James I., might justly have had his coat

¹ [Letter xxiii.]

² [Letter xxxi.]

³ [Letter xxxii.]

⁴ [Letter xxxiii.]

⁵ [Letter xxiii., to Garrick.]

pulled over his ears for exceeding the privileges of his office.

For a while Sterne made himself happy at Toulouse, "fiddling, laughing, singing, and cracking jokes," with the English residents.¹ But, far from being enamoured of the French, he complained of their eternal platitude, their little variety, their no originality, and, what to him was the worst of all faults, their determined seriousness.² The nation was, in fact, playing a borrowed part, and acted it ill. Montesquieu, writing in 1721 of the passion of the people for imitating their king, said sarcastically, that the monarch, if he undertook it, might even succeed in making them grave. It was this which they now attempted to become, not in mimicry of their sovereign, but of ourselves. When Horace Walpole visited Paris in 1765, he reported that they were another people from what he had found them five-and-twenty years before; that laughing was quite out of fashion, and that nothing was wanted but George Grenville to make the conversations the most tiresome upon earth. Solemn and pedantic, they were seldom, he said, animated unless by a dispute, and he could only venture to be merry in his own tongue.³ If Sterne had arrived at any other period, the proverbial liveliness of the nation would have given a spring to his own, and the shuttlecock would have flown backwards and forwards from morning till night without ever tiring him of the game. But he was disgusted with the insufferable insipidity of this unnatural effort to be dull; and in June, 1763, he set out, with his wife and daughter, for Bagnières, hoping to extract "amusement out of the concourse of adventurers which gathered together there from all the corners of the earth."⁴ October found him at Montpellier,⁵ where he spent the winter, and where, in January, he had another scuffle with death, in which he suffered

¹ [Letter xxxvi.]

² [Letters xxxi., xxxiii.]

³ [Walpole to T. Brand, Oct. 19, 1765, *Letters*, vol. iv. p. 425.]

⁴ [Letter xxxviii., vol. ix. p. 122.]

⁵ [Letter xliii., p. 130.]

terribly. It was again a fever, which had nearly cut short Yorick's lifelong peal of laughter. But he was not to be depressed. While barely out of danger, and still weak and prostrate, he took up his pen to announce his resolution of going on to the end of the chapter "as merrily, although as innocently, as he could." "It has ever," he said, "been as good, if not better than a bishopric to me, and I desire no other."¹

The medical theories of France were as antiquated as many of the other usages which kept their ground under the old *régime*. The physicians, whom Sterne calls the most ignorant of all pretending fools,² gave him, to recruit his strength, *bouillons rafraichissants*, which consisted of a cock that had been flayed alive, and a male crawfish (for a female, according to the Montpellier pharmacopœia, was more pernicious than strengthening) boiled with poppy seeds, and pounded in a mortar.³ It is difficult to believe that the period when this enlightened practice prevailed on the other side of the Channel, was the same in which John and William Hunter were flourishing in England. Sterne, who swallowed perhaps a female crawfish instead of a male, derived no benefit from the regimen, and as he originally went to the continent for his health, so he now hoped for the same blessing from a return to his native land. "Every step I take that brings me nearer England will, I think, help to set this poor frame to rights."⁴ He commenced his journey homewards in February, 1764—his heart, he said, had fled there a twelvemonth before⁵—but he lingered in Paris till the end of May. He was induced to remain by finding an opportunity to indulge in his favourite amusement. He states in his letters, and repeats in his *Sentimental Journey*, that he had been in love with some *Dulcinea* or other all his life, that it had sweetened his temper, softened and humanised his heart, and that he

¹ [Letter xliv.]

⁴ [*Ibid.*]

² [Letter xxxiii.]

⁵ [Letter xliii.]

³ [Letter xlv.]

hoped to carry on these vagrant courtships till he died.¹ He did not pretend that his attachments were Platonic, but he called them sentimental, and the idea that he affixed to the term will be best understood by his own account of his conduct in the present conjuncture. "I have been for eight weeks," he writes to Stevenson, "smitten with the tenderest passion that ever tender wight underwent. I wish, dear cousin, thou couldest conceive (perhaps thou canst without my wishing it) how deliciously I cantered away with it the first month; two up, two down, always upon my *hâanches* along the streets, from my hotel to hers, at first once, then twice, then three times a day, till at length I was within an ace of setting up my hobby-horse in her stable for good and all. I might as well, considering how the enemies of the Lord have blasphemed thereupon. The last three weeks we were every hour upon the doleful ditty of parting; and thou mayest conceive, dear cousin, how it altered my gait and air, for I went and came like any loudened carle, and did nothing but mix tears, and *jouer des sentiments* with her, from sun rising even to the setting of the same; and now she is gone to the south of France; and to finish the *comédie* I fell ill, and broke a vessel in my lungs, and half bled to death. *Voilà mon histoire!*"² There is his history disposed by himself in the light in which he wished it to be viewed by his friends, and there, upon the most favourable interpretation, is his condemnation.

During his stay in Paris he preached in the ambassador's chapel, before a concourse of all nations and creeds,³ who were drawn together to hear the celebrated Sterne, the last sermon his deplorable health ever allowed him to deliver. To the people of York his appearance in the pulpit had long been a scandal. Such was the infamy of his private character, that when he came to the cathedral to preach, in his capacity of prebendary, many

¹ [Letter lviii.; *Sentimental Journey*, "Montriul"; *Works*, vol. v. p. 63.]

² [*Seven Letters by Sterne and his Friends.*]

³ [Letter xlvii.]

of the congregation rose from their seats and walked away. How this would have affected Yorick is easily divined from the language he held on kindred occasions; he would have laughed at their scruples and been thankful that he was a sinner and not a pharisee.

When Yorick returned to England he left his wife and daughter abroad at their own particular request.¹ The plea of Mrs. Sterne was ill health, but it is stated by Almon, in his *Life of Wilkes*, that her real motive for remaining in France was "to escape the daily provocations of an unkind husband." His disposition is said to have been irritable, his conversation in his family was, as Almon intimates, too gross to be tolerated, and the appropriation of his volatile affections to an endless series of Dulcineas may have proved a lenitive to his own temper, but must have been far from producing the same soothing effects on Mrs. Sterne. At Montpellier, where M. Tollot saw them together, he reports that she followed the good man everywhere, and "vouloit être de tout." "Ces dispositions dans cette bonne dame," he continues, "lui ont fait passer d'assez mauvais momens; il supporte tous ces désagréments avec une patience d'ange."² M. Tollot was a disciple of the Yorick school, and thought it a hardship for a husband to be saddled with the society of his wife; but, by Sterne's own testimony, the *patience d'ange* was on the other side. "She may talk," he observes, writing at this period from Toulouse; "I will go my own way, and she will acquiesce without a word of debate on the subject. Who can say so much in praise of his wife?"³ Another passage of a letter, addressed to Stevenson, from Coxwold, in August, 1761, after he had unduly protracted his London season, is a proof that she was a placable and yielding person. "Curse," he says, in allusion to the society he had left behind, the moment he finds himself at Mrs. Sterne's elbow, 'Curse of absence from those we love! As to matrimony,"

¹ [Letter xlvi.]

² [*Seven Letters, etc.*]

³ [Letter xxxiii.]

he adds, in qualification of this emphatic outbreak, "I should be a beast to rail at it, for my wife is easy, but the world is not; and had I stayed from her a second longer, it would have been a burning shame—else she declares herself happier without me. Not in anger is this declaration made, but in pure, sober good sense, built on sound experience."¹ Several times after their separation he expressed a wish that she should return to England—moved chiefly, no doubt, by his attachment to his daughter, which was ardent and sincere. Mrs. Sterne resisted the call till his days were drawing to a close, and the issue of the experiment showed that she had done wisely for their mutual comfort in keeping away. In the interim he always wrote of her with kindness, sometimes with apparent affection, and showed a practical anxiety that she should never be pinched for lack of means. "My purse," he remarks on one occasion, "shall be as open as my heart."² "Why do you say," he asks at another time, "that your mother wants money? Whilst I have a shilling, shall you not both have ninepence out of it?"³ This was not the proportion in which he divided his income, but his liberality was really considerable, insomuch that we are tempted to doubt the story, so often repeated, that he preferred whining over a dead ass to relieving a living mother.

After recreating himself at York, Scarborough, and other places, he settled down at Coxwold, in September, 1764, to get ready his commodities, according to the old custom, for the winter market.⁴ His two little volumes—the seventh and eighth—were this time entirely of a comic cast. "I am fabricating them," he said, "for the laughing part of the world—for the melancholy part of it I have nothing but my prayers."⁵ They had been long in preparation, and were published early in 1765. It was three years since he had shown himself in London society, or printed

¹ [Letter xviii.]² [Letter xlvii.]³ [Letter lxxix.]⁴ [Letter li.]⁵ [Letter xxxiv.]

a line, and it was probably due in some degree to this pause in his proceedings that he and his work were so well received. "I have never had a moment," he wrote of himself, "which has not been broke in upon by one engagement or impertinence or another"; for though he sojourned in London for no other purpose than to expose himself to these impertinences and engagements, he had the common weakness of attempting to enhance the civilities he received by pretending that they were thrust upon him against his will. Of his book he said, "I have had a lucrative winter's campaign. Shandy sells well. I am taxing the public with two more volumes of Sermons, which will more than double the gains of Shandy."¹ Nevertheless, the continuation of Tristram, though displaying many of the qualities of the author's genius, was not equal to the first sprightly runnings of the cask. Several chapters on his journey abroad, which his flattering friends² told him were executed with spirit, and which he informs us were meant as a good-tempered satire against coxcombical travellers,³ posterity has condemned as absolute nonsense. The grossness was more revolting than ever, and more thickly spread; and, while his worst characteristics were gaining upon his best, the beauties themselves were not equal to many he had formerly produced.

The Sermons he mentions as making part of his ways and means for the year, were written, or at least dressed up, for the occasion, and were not completed till the autumn of 1765. He published them by subscription, which, independently of the sale of the copyright, brought him upwards of three hundred pounds. His list he supposed to be the largest and most splendid an author ever obtained.⁴ After having procured the patronage of nearly

¹ [Letter lv.]

² Sterne makes a good observation when replying to the panegyrics of a person who calls himself Ignatius Sancho: "'Tis all affectation to say a man is not gratified with being praised; we only want it to be *sincere*."—[Letter c.]

³ [Letter lii.]

⁴ [Letter lvii.]

all the nobility, and most other persons of note, he was ambitious to add the name of David Hume. He requested Mr. Foley, the banker at Paris, where Hume then was, to canvass him for the purpose, jocosely threatening if the historian refused, to "quarrel with him, and call him *Deist*."¹ What are we to think of the creed of the Reverend Laurence Sterne, when we find him eager for the honour of including a notorious infidel among the subscribers to his Sermons, and in the very act of inviting this insult to the religion he professed, treating the infidelity as a joke? Strange to say, in the Parisian circle in which Hume moved, *Deist* was really in danger of becoming a term of reproach in the opposite sense to what Sterne intended. In this very year of 1765, Walpole wrote home that Voltaire himself was too much of a believer for the male and female *philosophes* of France. "Il est *bigot*," said one of these lady atheists, "c'est un *Déiste*."² At a party, in Paris, in which Sterne himself was maintaining the necessity of a First Cause, a young count took him by the hand to the farthest corner of the room, to tell him his *solitaire* was pinned too straight about his neck. "It should be *plus badinant*," said the count, looking down upon his own; "but a word, M. Yorick, *to the wise*." The scepticism of Hume was here as contemptible for its timidity as it was offensive in England for its daring. He remarked at a dinner at the house of the Baron d'Holbach that he had never seen an atheist, and did not believe that one existed. "You have been unfortunate," replied the baron; "you now see seventeen at table for the first time." To the historian, who had reduced his creed to the single article, "I believe in God," the infidelity of those who erased it altogether might be expected to be a jest; and having enumerated, in a letter to Dr. Blair, his literary acquaintances at Paris, he added that his clerical friends in Scotland would be

¹ [Letter lvii.]

² [Walpole to Gray, Nov. 19, 1765, *Letters*, vol. iv. p. 436.]

glad to hear "that there was not a single *Deist* among them." Such was one of the portentous signs of that frightful reign of libertinism and impiety which preceded and prepared the French Revolution, and which was so little shocking to Mr. Yorick, that in announcing his intention of returning to the continent in 1767, he said he should "enjoy himself a week or ten days at Paris with his friends, *particularly* the Baron d'Holbach and the rest of the joyous set,"¹ which included, we may presume, the remaining sixteen atheists. What is stronger evidence against him still is the mocking application, in many of his letters, of the most sacred language. One example of horrible blasphemy, addressed to Stevenson, which seems inconsistent with any description of belief, will render needless an accumulation of passages which it is revolting to transcribe. The person mentioned in the extract, under the name of Panty, was the Rev. Robert Lascelles, a clergyman after Sterne's own heart.

Remember me sometimes in your potations; bid Panty pray for me when he prays for the Holy Catholic Church. Present my compliments to Mrs. Ferguson, and be in peace and charity with all mankind.

And the blessing of God the Father,

Son,

&

Holy Ghost be with you,

Amen. L. STERNE.

To throw the words into the form of an ordinary conclusion to a letter, for the purpose of aggravating the profanity, was, in Sterne's estimation, to heighten the jest.

With the profits of *Tristram* and his *Sermons*, Sterne started, in October, 1765, on another tour in search of health, and fresh materials for his works. He passed through France to Italy, where he visited all the principal cities, and got back to England in June, 1766. Both his

¹ [Letter lxxvii.]

objects were answered. He conceived the plan, and collected the incidents of the *Sentimental Journey*, and his health improved so much that he believed he had added ten years to his life.¹ From every place that he writes he speaks of the jovial hours he spends, and he sums up by saying, on his return to Coxwold, "Never man, my dear sir, has had a more agreeable tour than your Yorick."² La Fleur, whom he has immortalised in the *Sentimental Journey*, said however that there were moments when his master seemed sunk in the deepest dejection, but he would shake it off, and cry out gaily, "Vive la bagatelle."³ There are many indications that the merriment which had once been spontaneous was often henceforth artificial—the forced effort to keep at bay an encroaching melancholy, which was necessarily intolerable, since in making him a sadder it did not make him a wiser man. The contrast between the quiet of Coxwold and the excitement of travelling was rendered endurable by the preparation of the ninth and last volume of *Tristram Shandy*, which occupied him incessantly from July to Christmas. He had always been a slow composer, for there never was an author, as we are informed by Paley, whose works had cost him greater labour,⁴ and his ideas could not be expected to flow so rapidly as when he first began to draw upon the fund. "Tristram goes on busily," he says in December; "what I can find appetite to write is so so." But this disparaging admission, unusual with him, was wrung from him in a moment of vexation. "You never," he continues, "read such a chapter of evils from me. I'm tormented to death by my Stillington enclosure, and am every hour threatened with a journey to Avignon, where Mrs. Sterne is very bad, and, by a series of letters I have got from Lydia, I suppose is going the way of us all."

¹ [Letter lxix.]

² [Letter lxxi.]

³ [Walter Scott's *Miscellaneous Prose Works*, 1878, vol. i. p. 301, from Davis's *Olio*.]

⁴ [Paley's *Life* by his son, *Works*, vol. i. p. 109.]

The expected decease of his wife appears to affect him in no other way than as it may involve an inopportune journey to Avignon, and it is therefore by a natural association of ideas that he couples it with the distractions which grow out of the Stillington enclosure. Mrs. Sterne recovered partially, but he himself lost the ground he had gained in Italy. The bleeding from his lungs was worse than ever, and he talked of flying again over the Alps to escape from the clutches of death. In the meanwhile he went at the end of December to York, "because," he said, "I had rather, in case 'tis ordained so, die there, than in a post-chaise on the road."¹ But, while conscious that he is probably within a step of his grave, he sets his face to the world, is as intent as ever to laugh and make laugh, plans amusements for months to come, and anticipates the jovial time he shall have of it when he joins the Baron d'Holbach and his atheistical crew.

Three days after Sterne had spoken doubtfully of his ninth volume he recovered his good opinion of it, and says to another correspondent, "If the amours of my Uncle Toby do not please you I am mistaken."² When published, at the beginning of 1767, he announced to M. Panchaud, at Paris, that in London it was liked the best of the set.³ This idea we suspect he derived from the deceitful compliments of personal friends. Bright flashes of genius were never wanting, but, if his ninth volume charmed the most, it must have been by its licence, and not by its genuine deserts. The hostile section, however, of the public were beginning to acknowledge the general merit of the entire work, a homage which Sterne ascribes to its reception in Italy, Germany, and France.⁴ It was rather, we think, due to the inevitable victory of genius over envy, which cannot for ever remain blind to the light it would fain have extinguished.

On his arrival in London, in January, 1767, Sterne made

¹ [Letter lxxvii.]

² [*Ibid.*]

³ [Letter lxxviii.]

⁴ [Letter cxxv.]

the acquaintance of the Mrs. Draper, upon whom he has conferred an unenviable celebrity. She was the wife of one Daniel Draper, a counsellor at Bombay, had come to England for her health, and was on the eve of returning, at the command of her husband, to India, without having accomplished the object of her voyage. Her vanity, triumphing over her discretion, induced her to preserve ten letters which Sterne addressed to her between the end of March and the 3rd of April, when she sailed from Deal. These epistles are written in a strain of the most rapturous love, and contain damning evidence of the utter worthlessness of poor Yorick's character. A single extract will serve for the summary, as it is the climax, of his amatory apostrophes. He writes to her: "Talking of widows, pray, Eliza, if ever you are such, do not think of giving yourself to some wealthy nabob, because I design to marry you myself. My wife cannot live long, and I know not the woman I should like so well for her substitute as yourself. 'Tis true, I am ninety-five in constitution, and you but twenty-five—rather too great a disparity this!—but what I want in youth, I will make up in wit and good-humour. Not Swift so loved his Stella, Scarron his Maintenon, or Waller his Sacharissa, as I will love and sing thee, my wife elect. Tell me, in answer to this, that you approve and honour the proposal, and that you would (like the Spectator's mistress) have more joy in putting on an old man's slippers than associating with the gay, the voluptuous, and the young."¹

It was no playful pretence that his wife "could not live long." She was in a languishing condition, which made him really believe that she was hastening to the grave; and, if the general tenor of his epistles to Mrs. Draper permitted us to believe that the rest of the passage was a piece of jesting extravagance, it is impossible to explain away the utter heartlessness of the portion which relates to Mrs. Sterne. But this is not all. Some friends of

¹ [Letter lxxxix.]

Mrs. Draper charitably interposed to check the dangerous intimacy, an interference which filled him with the deadliest hatred to them.¹ The object of their solicitude, on the contrary, honoured their motives while rejecting their counsel, and could not be brought to share his resentment. The scheme by which he ultimately succeeded in alienating her from her honest advisers is related by himself with unblushing effrontery in a letter to a friend: "They are bitter enemies of mine, and I am even with them. La Brahmine [Mrs. Draper] assured me they used their endeavours with her to break off her friendship with me, for reasons I will not write, but tell you. I said enough of them before she left England, and though she yielded to me in every other point, yet in this she obstinately persisted. Strange infatuation! But I think I have effected my purpose by a falsity, which Yorick's friendship to the Brahmine can only justify. I wrote her word that the most amiable of women"—a Mrs. James, for whom Mrs. Draper had an extreme regard—"reiterated my request that she would not write to them. I said, too, she had concealed many things for the sake of her peace of mind, when, in fact, this was merely a child of my own brain, made Mrs. James's by adoption, to enforce the argument I had before urged so strongly. Do not mention this circumstance to Mrs. James. 'Twould displease her; and I had no design in it but for the Brahmine to be a friend to herself."²

The letters in which Sterne unfolded his slanderous fiction are among the number preserved by the Brahmine. "The ——'s, by heavens," he says, in the first, "are worthless. I have heard enough to tremble at the articulation of the name. How could you, Eliza, leave them, or suffer them to leave you rather, with impressions the least favourable? I have told thee enough to plant disgust against their treachery to thee, to the last hour of thy life! Yet still thou toldest Mrs. James, at last, that thou believest

¹ [*Ibid.*]² [Letter xcix.]

they affectionately love thee. Her delicacy to my Eliza, and true regard to her ease of mind, have saved thee from hearing more glaring proofs of their baseness. For God's sake write not to them, nor foul thy fair character with such polluted hearts. *They* love thee! What proof? Is it their actions that say so? or their zeal for those attachments which do thee honour, and make thee happy? or their tenderness for thy fame? No. But they weep, and say tender things. Adieu to all such for ever. Mrs. James's honest heart revolts against the idea of ever returning them one visit."¹

"Adieu to all such for ever!" Then, first and foremost adieu to Yorick, who was the very type of that sentimental virtue which consisted in weeping and saying tender things, who was fabricating malicious falsehoods in the very act of talking of honest and polluted hearts, and who maintained that the affection of these people must be hollow and hypocritical, unless they were zealous for the attachment of the husband of Mrs. Sterne to the wife of Daniel Draper. Fearing that his lie might not be sufficiently emphatic to take effect, he shortly after despatched a second edition, enlarged and improved: "The ——'s, who verify the character I once gave of teasing, or sticking like pitch or birdlime, sent a card that they would wait on Mrs. [James] on Friday. She sent back she was engaged. Then to meet at Ranelagh to-night. She answered, she did not go. She says, if she allows the least footing, she never shall get rid of the acquaintance, which she is resolved to drop at once. She knows them. She knows they are not her friends, nor yours; and the first use they would make of being with her, would be to sacrifice you to her (if they could) a second time. Let her not then, let her not, my dear, be a greater friend to thee than thou art to thyself. She begs me to reiterate my request to you that you will not write to them. It will give her and thy Brahmin inexpressible pain. Be assured all this is not

¹ [Letter lxxxiv.]

without reason on her side. I said I never more would mention the name to thee; and had I not received it, as a kind of charge, from a dear woman that loves you, I should not have broke my word. I will write again to-morrow to thee, thou best and most endearing of girls! A peaceful night to thee. My spirit will be with thee through every watch of it."¹

To complete his self-condemnation, the man who had the hardihood to invent this audacious and circumstantial falsehood, out of revenge for an attempt to keep Mrs. Draper from a discreditable intimacy, says to her himself in his very next letter, "Be cautious only, my dear, *of intimacies*," and then immediately adds, "*Love me, I beseech thee*; and remember me for ever!"² That his vehement passion for his Brahmine was not founded upon any genuine esteem for her character appeared, a little later, from what he wrote to his daughter: "The subject of thy letter has astonished me. She could but know little of my feelings to tell thee that, under the supposition I should survive thy mother, I should bequeath thee as a legacy to [Mrs. Draper]. No, my Lydia! 'tis a lady, *whose virtues I wish thee to imitate*, that I shall entrust my girl to—I mean that friend [Mrs. James] whom I have so often talked and wrote about. From her you will learn to be an affectionate wife, a tender mother, and a sincere friend."³

Mrs. Draper, too, was wife, mother, and friend, and the lover had once called her the "best of God's works";⁴ but the father saw her with very different eyes.⁵

¹ [Letter lxxxvi.]

² [Letter lxxxvii.]

³ [Letter cxxvii.]

⁴ [Letter lxxxvii.]

⁵ Mrs. Draper again returned to England, and died at Bristol at the age of thirty-three. The editor of Sterne's Letters states that "the circumstances which attended the latter part of her life are generally said to have reflected no credit on her discretion." [*Works*, vol. x. p. 3, note.] Raynal, who became acquainted with her after Sterne's death, has commemorated her in his *Histoire Philosophique des deux Indes*. When treating of the English settlements on the coast of Malabar, he suddenly launches out into this super-French piece of bombast: "Territory of Anjinga, you are nothing;

Yorick soon consoled himself for the loss of his Brahmine; and, if an undated letter is rightly placed in the series, was making criminal love in April, with all the heart he had, to one Lady P.¹ The old bleeding from his lungs returned in the dissipation of London,² and the languor of sickness produced in him thoughts which, common as they are with others in similar circumstances, were rare with him. "I am impatient," he says, "to set out for my solitude, for there the mind gains strength, and learns to lean upon herself. In the world it seeks or accepts of a few treacherous supports—the feigned compassion of one, the flattery of a second, the civilities of a third, the friendship of a fourth. They all deceive, and bring the mind back to where mine is retreating, to retirement, reflection, and books."³

He left town at the beginning of May, with an idea that he was taking leave of it for ever, and sick, he said, in soul as well as body.⁴ He quickly recruited his strength at Coxwold, and for a time his spirits, but there are repeated allusions to some mysterious source of disquietude which

but you have given birth to Eliza. One day these commercial establishments founded by Europeans on the coasts of Asia will exist no more. The grass will cover them, or the avenged Indian will have built over their ruins; but, if my writings have any duration, the name of Anjinga will remain in the memory of men. Those who shall read my works, those whom the winds shall waft to thy shores, will say, It is there that Eliza Draper was born; and, if there is a Briton among them, he will hasten to add with pride, And she was born of English parents." There are three more pages of panegyric, increasing in extravagance as it proceeds, and which thus concludes: "From the height of the heavens, thy first and last country, receive, Eliza, my oath, 'I swear never to write a line in which the world shall not recognise thy friend.'" According to M. Walckenaer, this apostrophe has been considered sublime by some and ridiculous by others. [*Biog. Univ.*, t. xliii. p. 531.] It can only have been the ridiculous that ever thought it sublime. Sterne and Raynal both agree that Mrs. Draper was plain. [Letter lxxxvi.] Raynal, meaning to compliment her, says that she was an extraordinary combination of voluptuousness and modesty. Sterne says, but it is to herself that he says it, that he had never seen so intelligent and animated a countenance, and that she had something more persuasive in her eyes and voice than any woman he had ever known. [Letter lxxxvi.] There can be no doubt that she possessed unusual powers of fascination.

¹ [Letter xcii.]² [Letter xc.]³ [Letter xcv.]⁴ [Letter xcvi.]

is nowhere explained. "I never have been so well," he wrote to Stevenson, in August, "since I left college, and I should be a marvellous happy man, but for some reflections which bow down my spirits;—but, if I live but even three or four years, I will acquit myself with honour,—and—no matter! we will talk this over when we meet."¹

Indecorum and profanity mingle strangely with these pensive outbreaks, and oblige us to believe that it was a more vulgar trouble than that of conscience. In October, Mrs. Sterne and his daughter came from France, at his urgent request, to stay with him two or three months; but the increase to his comfort was not what he anticipated, for in December he wrote a ribald letter in Latin to Stevenson, informing him that he was more weary of his wife than ever, and mortally in love with somebody else.² "The child and darling of his heart," as he calls Miss Sterne, fulfilled however his utmost expectations. "She is all," he said, "heaven could give him in a daughter."³ "My heart bleeds," he wrote a little later, "when I think of parting with my child. 'Twill be like the separation of soul and body, and equal to nothing but what passes at that tremendous moment."⁴ The taint which had infected the rest of his mind left this paternal feeling uncorrupted to the end.

The months he passed at Coxwold were bestowed in composing the *Sentimental Journey*. "It is a subject," he said, "which works well, and suits the frame of mind I have been in for some time past. I told you my design in it was to teach us to love the world and our fellow-creatures better than we do; so it runs most upon those gentler passions and affections which aid so much to it."⁵ He affirmed that the excess of his emotions on the occasion had torn his whole frame to pieces. "Praised be God," he exclaims, "for my sensibility! Though it has often made me wretched, yet I would not exchange it for

¹ [Letter civ.]² [Letter cxix.]³ [Letter cxiii.]⁴ [Letter cxviii.]⁵ [Letter cxiii.]

all the pleasures the grossest sensualist ever felt."¹ His susceptible nature was easily hurried on in any track in which it once began to move, and he persuaded himself, and endeavoured to persuade his friends, that he was a Sentimental and not a Shandean being. Yet, even while resigning himself to this tender mood, his licentious imagination could not sleep, and the same fountain continued to send forth both sweet water and bitter. The incurable depravity of his taste is nowhere more apparent than in his latest work.

The *Sentimental Journey* was published by subscription in February, 1768. He predicted that it would take with the generality, especially the women, who "will read this book," he said, "in the parlour, and Tristram in the bed-chamber."² Horace Walpole himself was won over. He thought the volumes "very pleasing, though too much dilated, and infinitely preferable to the tiresome *Tristram Shandy*."³ When Sterne left London the preceding year in a half-dying state, he professed that he should be content to have only just so much strength and spirits as would enable him to execute his summer's task.⁴ His wish had been granted, but he was not destined to enjoy the consequent success. "What is the gratification of my feelings on this occasion?" he wrote to his daughter, on the 20th of February. "The want of health bows me down, and vanity harbours not in thy father's breast."⁵ The spring before, when his patient and exorable creditor knocked at his door, he declared that the call was both unexpected and unpleasant.⁶ Unpleasant it would always have been, but it should not have been unexpected to a man who had lived for years in the shadow of death. Hope still predominated in his sanguine breast, and he thought he should once more come off triumphant, though he admitted that the respite might not unlikely be of short

¹ [Letter cviii.]

³ [Walpole's *Letters*, vol. v. p. 91.]

⁵ [Letter cxxvii.]

² [Letter cxxvi.]

⁴ [Letter c.]

⁶ [Letter xcv.]

duration.¹ A fortnight afterwards the influenza, with which his sickness commenced, became complicated with pleurisy. By repeated bleeding and blistering the disease was subdued, and his medical attendant reported him better; but poor Yorick had an inward monitor more sagacious than his physician. "My spirits," he said, "are fled—'tis a bad omen."² It was now that, about ten days before his death, he addressed a letter, the last he ever wrote, to his friend Mrs. James, a lady apparently of real worth, and for whom he had a sincere and honourable admiration. "Dearest, kindest, gentlest, and best of women!" he said, "may health, peace, and happiness prove your handmaids! If I die, cherish the remembrance of me, and forget the follies which you so often condemned,—which my heart, not my head, betrayed me into." But it was to commend his daughter, and not himself, to her kind consideration, that, with a failing hand, he took up his pen. "Should my child, my Lydia, want a mother, may I hope you will, if she is left parentless, take her to your bosom? You are the only woman on earth I can depend upon for such a benevolent action." To groan over his maladies, whether of body or mind, was not among the weaknesses of Sterne. It had always been his policy to laugh down evils, and it tells a touching tale that the letter which conveyed his dying request is subscribed "Your *poor* affectionate friend."³

There is a passage in *Tristram Shandy*, which the event made memorable, in which *Sterne* declares that, if he were in a condition to stipulate with Death, he would demand that the catastrophe should not occur in his own house. "At home,—I know it,—the concern of my friends, and the last services of wiping my brows and smoothing my pillow, will so crucify my soul, that I shall die of a distemper which my physician is not aware of; but, in an inn, the few cold offices I wanted would be purchased with a few guineas, and paid me with an un-

¹ [Letter cxxvii.]

² [Letter cxxviii.]

³ [*Ibid.*]

disturbed but punctual attention.”¹ He breathed his last at his lodgings in Old Bond Street,² and few and cold enough were the offices that he received. Dr. Ferriar had heard that the hard-hearted attendants robbed him of his gold shirt-buttons as he lay helpless in bed.³ On the evening of the 18th of March there was a distinguished party assembled in Clifford Street, including, besides several persons of rank, Garrick, Hume, and Mr. James, the husband of the lady whom Sterne had entreated to adopt his Lydia. The sick man, who is said by the narrator to have been “a very great favourite with the gentlemen,” naturally became a topic of conversation in a company where some were his intimate friends, and probably all his acquaintances, and their host sent the footman to inquire how he did. The landlady, who opened the door, bid the messenger go up to the nurse. On entering the room he saw that the crisis was so near at hand that he waited for the end. When he had been there five minutes, Sterne exclaimed, “Now it is come!” and putting up his hand, as if to ward off a blow, expired in the act.⁴ The merry-makers in Clifford Street were grieved at the intelligence. Not one among them but must have remembered with sadness the moralising of Hamlet upon that “fellow of infinite jest,” after whom their departed companion had called himself, and by whose name he was familiarly known among his associates. “Where be your gibes now? your gambols? your songs? your flashes of merriment that were wont to set the table in a roar?”⁵ The world for which Yorick had lived, and the inevitable hour which showed its vanity, were never

¹ [*Tristram Shandy*, vol. vii. chap. xii.]

² The number, as we learn from Mr. Cunningham’s *Handbook of Modern London*, was 41,—then a silk-bag shop.

³ [Ferriar’s *Sterne*, vol ii. p. 42.]

⁴ *The Life of a Footman, or the Travels of James Macdonald*, quoted by Mr. Forster, in his *Life and Times of Oliver Goldsmith*. [Vol. ii. p. 126, 5th ed.]

⁵ [*Hamlet*, Act V. Sc. i.]

brought into closer juxtaposition. He was privately interred in the burial-ground of St. George, Hanover Square, with no memorial to mark the spot, which drew four lines from Garrick, complaining of a reproach that he took no steps to remove :—

Shall Pride a heap of sculptured marble raise,
Some worthless, unmourn'd, titled fool to praise,
And shall we not by one poor grave-stone learn
Where Genius, Wit, and Humour sleep with Sterne?¹

A couple of ignorant and vainglorious freemasons at last came forward to supply the omission. They erected a plain headstone, with a paltry inscription, purporting that, "although Sterne did not live to be a member of their society, yet, as his all-incomparable performances evidently proved him to have acted by rule and square, they rejoice in this opportunity of perpetuating his high and irreproachable character to after ages."² His grave had better have remained undistinguished than been desecrated by this ridiculously false and offensively patronising epitaph.

The debts of Sterne amounted to eleven hundred pounds, his effects sold for four hundred, and his widow undertook the impossible task of discharging the difference out of a small estate of forty pounds per annum, which was all that remained to her. Eight hundred pounds were collected for her in the race-week at York, and she raised a small additional sum by the subscriptions she obtained to some posthumous sermons and by the sale of the copyright. Wilkes and Hall-Stevenson engaged to write a Life of poor Yorick for her benefit, and Miss Sterne addressed them some piteous letters, urging them, on the ground of the pecuniary distress of herself and her mother, to keep a promise, which they never performed. They may have felt on reflection that there was little to tell except faults and

¹ [Mme. de Medalle's Dedication to Sterne's Letters, *Works*, vol. ix. p. vi.]

² [*Works*, vol. i. p. xx.]

follies, which even his boon companions had too much sense to perpetuate. It was Miss Sterne herself, then become Madame de Medalle, who, in 1775, did the most to discredit her father's memory by publishing his correspondence. In one of her communications to Wilkes, she states that she and her mother are reluctant to display the letters to the world, but that if there is no other method of raising money they will send them to the press. Mrs. Sterne was dead when they appeared; and, though her daughter pleaded her authority for the publication,¹ it is in terms which do not amount to a permission to print the passages that tarnished the writer's name. What were the circumstances of Madame de Medalle at the time is unknown. It is not likely that she was utterly destitute; and, even if she had sold her father's reputation for bread, it would have been no justification of the crime.

Sterne was tall, thin, and pale. His face, he tells us, was as remarkable as his character,² and the fine portrait of him by Reynolds attests the truth of the description. The countenance is eminently indicative of mirth and wit, but an unmistakable and painful expression of evil mingles with the fun. He was beyond all question a profane and profligate man. M. Walckenaer, who wrote the sketch of him in the *Biographie Universelle*, was told in England by several persons who had known Sterne, or his friends, that he was by nature selfish, and altogether a stranger to the sensibility so conspicuous in his writings.³ It is certain, however, that his feelings were quick and easily moved. La Fleur testifies that he sobbed aloud at the tale of the love-lorn Maria, and that he relieved, as well as pitied, the wretched objects he met in his travels.⁴ These casual acts of charity are no extenuation of his general conduct; and the proof that he was possessed of a sensitive mind only

¹ [Preface to *Letters*, *Works*, vol. ix. p. ix.]

² [Letter lii.]

³ [*Biog. Univ.*, t. xliii. p. 532.]

⁴ [Walter Scott's *Miscellaneous Prose Works*, vol. i. p. 301, from Davis.]



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increases the guilt of defying its dictates. His highest aim in existence was

To play the trifle life away ;

and without the least regard to character, or duty, he followed the impulse of the moment, whatever it might be. His mirth was moulded on the maxim, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die"; his tenderness evaporated in love-making; his liberality mainly expended itself in sensual extravagance. His affection for his daughter, which is the best trait we know of him, was not sufficient to induce him to lay by a single sixpence for her provision, out of the many hundreds he received for his works. "If I live," he wrote to her in 1766, "the produce of my pen shall be yours. If fate reserves me not that, the humane and good,—part for thy father's sake, part for thy own,—will never abandon thee."¹ The virtue of such resolutions is in the performance. Had *he* been of the number of the "humane and good," his sole legacy to his daughter would not have consisted of a recommendation to the bounty of better men than himself.

"Nothing odd," said Dr. Johnson, in 1776, "will do long. Tristram Shandy did not last."² The sensation it excited upon its first appearance of necessity died away, and much which attracted by its novelty at the beginning grew repulsive in the end; but the entire library of fiction contains no more delightful pages, and none which bear a more palpable impress of genius, than many which are to be found in Tristram Shandy. Dr. Johnson, nevertheless, was not of the party who denied the talents of the author. He called him "*the man* Sterne," out of contempt for his character, but upon Goldsmith adding that he was "a very dull fellow," he was met by an emphatic "Why, no, sir," from the dictator.³ Once, however, when Miss Monckton, afterwards Countess of Cork, was insisting that there were pathetic passages in Sterne, Johnson

¹ [Letter lxxv.]

² [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 484.]

³ [*Ibid.*, p. 253.]

bluntly denied it. "I am sure," said she, "they have affected me." "Why that," replied the Doctor smiling, and rolling himself about, "is because, dearest, you're a dunce." When this lively lady, who was an especial favourite with him, reminded him afterwards of the speech, he answered, "Madam, if I had thought so, I certainly should not have said it."¹ He probably thought as little what he asserted in disparagement of Sterne, and only spoke out of a spirit of contradiction. Goldsmith, who, we fear, read *Tristram Shandy* with jealous eyes, was sincere in his censure. He attacked the work for its indecency in his *Chinese Letters*,² which would have been to his honour if he had not as strenuously denied its ability, and called the author "a blockhead."³ Dr. Farmer rated the wit and pathos of Sterne no higher than he estimated the scholarship of Shakespeare. He begged one B. N. Turner to mark his words, and remember he had predicted that, in twenty years from that period (1763), the man who wished to refer to *Tristram Shandy* would have to inquire for it of an antiquary. This, says the reporter in 1818, has proved truly prophetic.⁴ B. N. Turner must have measured the light of the world by the darkness of his burrow. The standard edition of Sterne's works had never failed to be reprinted at short intervals, and was again reproduced in 1819, a year after the prophecy had been completely fulfilled. The antiquaries may be permitted an exclusive property in Dr. Farmer, but, if they have a partiality for Sterne, they must be content to share him with the whole literary world. We wish that the defilement which stains the inside of his volumes was no greater than the dust which has gathered on the covers, or was as easily wiped away. One candid and admirable judge, to whose authority no exception can be taken, agreed with Goldsmith and Farmer. Sir James Mackintosh used to speak of his

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 689.] ² [*Citizen of the World*, Letter liii.]

³ [*Ibid.*, Letter lxxv.]

⁴ [Nichols's *Literary Anecdotes*, vol. ii. p. 618.]

low opinion of Sterne as his single literary heresy,—a heresy for which we can only suggest the insufficient explanation that the extravagances of some parts had blinded him to the wonderful merit of others. It would be endless to enumerate the opposing testimonies. Paley used to say that to read *Tristram Shandy* was the *summum bonum* of life.

Sterne did not rely for the interest of his novel upon the plot, of which there is little or none. His usual device for raising curiosity is to parade an unexpected event before he unfolds the circumstances which led to it. He thus manages to keep up a succession of riddles, an artifice which wearies by repetition, and which rather provokes impatience than produces eager surprise. The incidents, though peculiar, are thinly scattered, and seem to denote an invention original but not prolific. The extraneous matter with which he ekes out his volumes mars the narrative, and has seldom much intrinsic excellence. The power of the work is in isolated scenes, and above all in the representation of the Shandys. His leading idea is to exhibit them enthusiastic in pursuits which, either from their eccentric nature, or the disproportionate attention they engaged, appear ridiculous to ordinary people. In the phrase which he himself has engrafted into the English language, his principal personages had each their "hobby-horse." Of all the creations of this description, *Don Quixote* is, perhaps, the first in time, and beyond question is the first in excellence. Sterne, while avowing that he took Cervantes for his model,¹ did not attempt a feeble copy of an inimitable original. He borrowed the notion of a man mastered by a fantastic passion, and gave it an application thoroughly novel. *Uncle Toby* is his happiest conception, and, in accounting for the good soldier's propensities, Sterne has even outdone Cervantes. The madness of *Don Quixote* is beyond the limits of nature. That

¹ [*Tristram Shandy*, vol. i. chap. x.; vol. ii. chap. xix.; vol. ix. chap. xxiv.]

he should have heated his imagination with reading books of chivalry is sufficiently probable; that he should have resolved to imitate the heroes he worshipped is no incredible consequence: but that he should mistake windmills for giants, and flocks of sheep for armies, that he should act steadily upon such suppositions and never deviate from his delusion, exceeds, we believe, all the flights of insanity which are yet upon record. But grant Cervantes his premises, and nothing can be more truthful than his mode of applying them. Though Don Quixote is only crazed upon a single point, it is a point which affects the whole system of his life. In the complication of the poor knight's acts and speeches, Cervantes draws the line between sense and lunacy with admirable skill; and the extravagances which the Don commits, and the rational sentiments which he utters, are never out of keeping. There is a consistency in his behaviour, relatively to the conditions which are stated at starting, most difficult to contrive and most unerringly preserved. Modern campaigns are to Uncle Toby what knight-errantry was to Don Quixote. Captain Shandy, however, is sane. His imagination has not got the better of his senses, and if his military enthusiasm almost rivals the chivalrous frenzy of Don Quixote, it is due to the disease of the body instead of the mind. The genius of our author, often wild and wayward, has here displayed an exquisite tact, which becomes strikingly apparent when we disentangle the character from the rhapsodies and digressions in which Sterne has involved it.

Uncle Toby was wounded at the siege of Namur in his groin by a piece of stone splintered off from the fortifications. He returned to England, and a succession of exfoliations from the injured bones confined him to his room. His brother, with whom he was housed, conducted every visitor to his apartment that they might assist to beguile the anguish of the wound and the tedium of the confinement. The conversation naturally turned upon the

accident. From thence Uncle Toby proceeded to speak of the siege, and having no ideas which were not professional, he soon grew copious upon this single topic. The more he was minute, the less lucid he became. He got so entangled in the technicalities of the fortifications, and in the dykes and streams of the surrounding country, that he lost himself, and bewildered his hearers. The thought struck him to procure a military map for the illustration of his lecture, and the map again suggested an expansion of the scheme. He had before descanted chiefly upon that portion of the siege of which he was the eye-witness and the hero; he now purchased books to enable him to develop the entire history. Every taste of the spring increased the longing for a deeper draught. He bought plans of other towns, and more books from which to learn the art of attack and defence. Disabled for ever, without a possibility of turning his acquisitions to account, he was yet so entranced in his studies that he grudged to shave or change his shirt, and constantly forgot his dinner, his wound, and the world. The next stage to which he rode his hobby-horse brought him to the point which completed his happiness and gave piquancy to his character.

The maps, books, and instruments of Uncle Toby had outgrown his table. He ordered Corporal Trim to bespeak another twice its size, and the Corporal replied by expressing a hope that his honour would soon be well enough to leave London for his little estate in the country. There, upon a rood and a half of ground, Trim could execute a model of the fortifications, while Uncle Toby sat in the sun and directed the works. The capabilities of the scheme developed themselves on the instant in the good enthusiast's brain. "Trim," said he, with a face crimson with joy, "thou hast said enough." But Trim enlarged on the hint. "Say no more," exclaimed the enraptured Captain, and the proud Corporal continued his discourse on the pleasures and advantages of the plan. "Say no more," reiterated Uncle Toby; and, as often as he repeated

the phrase, no cheers that ever greeted orator could have afforded equal encouragement to Trim to proceed in his harangue. Unable to contain himself, the Captain leaped upon his sound leg, thrust a guinea into Trim's hand, and bid him bring up supper directly. Supper came, but Uncle Toby could not eat. "Get me," he said, "to bed"; but Uncle Toby could not sleep. A delicious waking dream had filled his imagination and absorbed all his faculties, mental and corporeal.

Hitherto Uncle Toby had borne his wound and imprisonment without a murmur. From the time he was fairly mounted on his hobby, he had grown quite indifferent to his groin, except that he disliked the interruption of having it dressed; but on the morning which succeeded his supperless and sleepless night, he remonstrated with the surgeon on the protraction of the cure. With much pathos, and at great length, he expatiated upon the misery of four years of captivity, and declared that, unless for his brother's tenderness, he must have sunk beneath the load. Uncle Toby was without guile; he understood no artifice, and would have disdained to practise it. He was the dupe of his own exaggeration when he applied to the whole of his sickness the feelings of impatience which were barely twelve hours old. His brother wept; the surgeon was petrified. For a man who never once had breathed a complaint, who seldom inquired after the wound, or concerned himself about the answer, suddenly to sum up into one grand total all the items of a four years' account was embarrassing in the extreme. When the surgeon was sufficiently collected to speak, he promised the Captain a speedy recovery, and named five or six weeks. To the feverish longing of the patient weeks and ages were the same. He determined inwardly to take the field without delay, and his mode of executing the resolve is an example of Sterne's delicate discrimination of character.

Uncle Toby was without a misgiving upon the importance of his pursuit, but he was sensible that the world was

not upon his side. To relinquish a sick chamber, at the risk of exasperating an ugly wound, and take a tedious journey into the country, for the purpose of digging mimic fortifications in his garden, was what he could justify to no understanding besides the Corporal's and his own. He therefore decided to elope. A chariot and four was ordered for twelve o'clock, when his brother was at the Exchange, and with his books, maps, instruments, and dressings, a pioneer's spade, a shovel and a pickaxe, he set off full speed to Shandy Hall. The whole vigour of his mind being directed to the toy in the bowling-green, his inventive faculties were continually suggesting some extension of the works. Now he bethought himself of providing batteries of miniature cannon, now of throwing a draw-bridge over the ditch he called a moat, now of procuring a number of doll-houses, constructed according to the system of architecture prevalent abroad, and which he arranged in the form of whatever city was besieged by the allies. The war was carried on at Shandy in rigorous imitation of the war on the continent. When Marlborough dug a trench, Uncle Toby furrowed his bowling-green; when Marlborough opened his batteries, Uncle Toby's cannon kept up a ceaseless pop; and when Marlborough effected a breach, Uncle Toby's works met with a similar catastrophe. Between pulling everything to pieces in taking one town, and putting them together again preparatory to besieging another, the Captain was in a perpetual heat of excitement and delight; and, having arrived at that pitch of fervour in which no suspicion of the futility of his proceedings ever troubled his pleasure, he had all the animation and pride of conquest without its dangers and fatigues.

The character of Uncle Toby is thus evolved naturally out of the circumstances in which he is placed, and has the merits, so hard to unite, of being as original as any monstrosity of the imagination, and as truthful as any transcript from commonplace life. He may be the creation

of fancy, and may never have had his counterpart, but he acts according to verified laws of the mind, and is like the countenance in an historical picture, which may be the portrait of no one, and yet be a masterly representation of a man.

The eccentricity which is only laughable raises no respect. One of the triumphs of the novelist's art is to dignify the ludicrous element by noble traits, without breaking in upon the consistency of the character. Cervantes, who must certainly have been a delighted devourer of the books he satirized, and who employed his reason to make a jest of his tastes, has displayed much of this blending skill. In reducing the rhodomontade of fiction to a rule of conduct, the knight of La Mancha outhivalries chivalry. His romantic daring, which no disasters can abate, his fortitude under suffering, his lofty principles, his generous zeal in the cause of the oppressed, qualify our laughter with a compassionate respect. Sterne has redeemed his hero from farcical contempt—nay, has rendered him far more lovable than ridiculous, by combining with his professional whims an exquisitely winning benignity of disposition. A warmer and gentler heart than that which inspired the martial courage and enthusiasm of Uncle Toby never beat in a bosom, nor could anyone have surpassed the author of *Tristram Shandy* in the taste and judgment with which he has portrayed the union of meek and manly qualities. There is nothing sickly, affected, or ostentatious. Uncle Toby's benevolence sits as natural upon him as his bravery. "There never," says Corporal Trim, "was a better officer in the king's army, or a better man in God's world."

The attendants of Don Quixote and Uncle Toby differ even more than their respective leaders. Two persons could not be represented as both insane upon the point of knight-errantry, nor could the Don's delusion have been so humorously exposed with a sympathising as with a dissimilar associate. Cervantes has, therefore, availed

himself of the power of contrast;—selfishness and disinterestedness, cowardice and courage, gross sense and wild fancy, are brought out with augmented force from their unceasing collision. It is solely the credulity of ignorance which keeps Sancho Panza in the train of Don Quixote. He is sufficiently aware of many of the knight's misconceptions to be always laughing at him in his sleeve; but he is imposed upon by the higher flights of his master's extravagance; and, when he listens to his rhapsodical discourses, and witnesses his deeds of frantic daring, he is constrained to credit his pretensions. Trim, instead of being the opposite, is, in his notions, the duplicate of Uncle Toby. Every fresh access of the Captain's military fever infected the Corporal in a like degree; and, indeed, they keep up a mutual excitement, which renders both more eager in the pursuit than either would have been without the other. Yet, with an identity of disposition, the character of the common soldier is nicely discriminated from that of the officer. His whole carriage bears traces of the drill-yard, which are wanting in his superior. Under the name of a servant he is in reality a companion, and he is a delightful mixture of familiarity in the essence, and the most deferential respect in forms. Of his simplicity and humanity it is enough to say that he was worthy to walk behind his master.

The crude outline of the character of Uncle Toby's brother is clearly borrowed from that of the elder Scriblerus, but it is filled up with a dramatic skill to which the original has no pretension. Mr. Shandy had been formerly a Turkey merchant, and, from reading antiquated books in the intervals of business, had got his mind imbued with obsolete theories. Whims which had been taken up half in jest, acquired force by meditation, and his fanciful conceptions became his serious convictions. To lose himself in these idle and intricate speculations, to urge them upon others, to apply them to the actual affairs of life, has become the single thought of his existence. Like all visionaries

who stand apart from the world, and frame schemes for its government in the closet, he had no consideration for what is feasible. He laments that the current of men and money should set in towards London; and, beguiled by a metaphor which he mistook for an argument, believes that the result will be apoplexy in the head and atrophy in the body. His plan for putting a stop to the evil is a specimen of the amount of his practical wisdom. "I would appoint able judges at every avenue of the metropolis, who should take cognizance of every fool's business who came there; and if, upon a fair and candid hearing, it appeared not of weight sufficient to leave his own home, and come up, bag and baggage, with his wife and children, farmers' sons, etc., etc., at his backside, they should be all sent back, from constable to constable, like vagrants, as they were, to the place of their legal settlement." A considerable portion of shrewdness and humour mingles with his absurdity. A leading article of his creed is that the characters of mankind are influenced by their christian names. "Your son," he would say to those that maintained that names were a matter of indifference, "your dear son, from whose sweet and open temper you have so much to expect,—your Billy, sir,—would you for the world have called him Judas?" "I never," adds Sterne, "knew a man able to answer this argument." Though by native disposition a benevolent person, the kindness of Mr. Shandy never stands in the way of his systems. He has no more feeling on such occasions than the withered mummies of the ages from which he has fetched not a few of his notions; for his fantastical ideas are paramount above all things, and a good heart has been entirely vanquished by a maggoty head. He has a notion, supported by plausible reasoning, that the Cæsarean operation was favourable to the genius of the child. "He mentioned the thing one afternoon to my mother,—merely as a matter of fact; but seeing her turn as pale as ashes at the very mention of it, as much as the operation flattered his hopes, he

thought it as well to say no more of it, contenting himself with admiring what he thought was to no purpose to propose." Mrs. Shandy, in the question, is nothing more to him than a *corpus vile*. Sterne explains that his design in the character was to laugh learned dunces out of countenance.¹ In this respect the satire is a failure. The speculations of Mr. Shandy are too remote from ordinary pedantry for the cap to fit. He must be considered as *sui generis*, an exceptional eccentricity ; and, thus viewed, the character is conceived with infinite humour and tact.

The brothers have retired to their ancestral village, where they pass their lives together, and the action of one upon the other is managed with wonderful address. They both ride their hobby-horses incessantly, but it is in parallel lines, which never meet at a single point, or rather, they proceed in opposite directions and are constantly coming into collision. The elder Mr. Shandy can never get above a step or two in a demonstration before the use of a word, which is common to civil and military affairs, carries Uncle Toby off into a professional digression ; and Uncle Toby's martial harangues are, in like manner, cut short by Mr. Shandy's scholastic commentaries. In general the Captain looks upon his brother's abstruse speculations as beyond his comprehension, and contents himself with occasionally whistling Lilibulero, when something is advanced which shocks his common sense. Mr. Shandy, on the other hand, holds Uncle Toby's military mania in complete contempt, laughs at it when he is in good humour, and inveighs against it when he is in bad. The blending quality which binds these unsympathising enthusiasts into social and fraternal harmony is a benevolence of soul, in which again the dispositions of the brothers are nicely distinguished ; for, while the heart of the Captain overflows with affection, the modified return which Mr. Shandy makes to it is not so much spontaneous as

¹ [Letter vi.]

generated by the excess of the quality in Uncle Toby. The strokes with which the portraits are drawn are altogether so deep and yet so delicate, so truthful and yet so novel, so simple in the outline and yet so varied in the details, so comical and yet so charming, that it may be questioned if, out of Shakespeare, there is a single character in English fiction depicted with greater or even equal power.

Dr. Slop has a nearer resemblance than the Shandys to everyday mortals. He is nevertheless original in a high degree, and his individuality could not have been more completely marked. Sterne asserted in the course of the story that there were not any personalities in the work. "I'll tread upon no one, quoth I to myself, when I mounted. I'll take a good rattling gallop; but I'll not hurt the poorest jackass upon the road."¹ In spite of this disclaimer, he has confessed in his letters that some of the strokes of satire were aimed at contemporaries;² and Dr. Ferriar has proved that Dr. Slop was intended for Dr. Burton, a Jacobite man-midwife at York.³ In the rebellion of 1745 he was committed to gaol by the uncle of Sterne, on suspicion of treason, and published a furious pamphlet on the subject. Though the novelist afterwards quarrelled with his uncle, he did not, it appears, forgive the enmities he had contracted under his auspices. His vengeance was tardy, but it was terrible. The annals of satire can furnish nothing more cutting than this consummate portrait, so farcical, and yet apparently so free from caricature. Dr. Slop is never introduced upon the scene except to expose him to contempt. He is described as only four feet and a half high, with a broad back and a protuberant belly. He is first exhibited to us upon a diminutive pony, which can hardly waddle under the weight of his dwarfed and portly figure. He is proceed-

¹ [*Tristram Shandy*, vol. iv. chap. xx.]

² [Letters vii., lii., etc.]

³ [Ferriar's *Illustrations of Sterne*, vol. i. chap. v.]

ing leisurely to make professional inquiries after Mrs. Shandy, whose time he knows has expired, and at the same moment Obadiah, the manservant, is galloping in the opposite direction upon a large coach-horse to summon him in haste. In turning a sharp corner, these unequal forces,—one vast, the other pigmy,—one at utmost speed, the other moving slow,—come suddenly face to face. Obadiah, in full career, is unable to pull up, and Slop, who, like his Jacobite prototype, is a papist, crosses himself in his terror, loses his hold in the act, tumbles plump into the miry road, and is splashed from head to foot, as he lies in the mud, by the plunging of the coach-horse.¹ In this laughable plight he is ushered into the house, where he has the mortification to find that Mrs. Shandy prefers the services of an old woman, and that he is only kept in reserve by Mr. Shandy in case of an emergency. Dr. Slop had left home without the implements of his calling, and Obadiah remounts the coach-horse to fetch them. As he trots along with the green baize bag which contains them, they keep up such a jingle that it was enough, says Sterne, “to have frightened Hymen out of the country.” Obadiah, to stop the noise, which prevented his hearing himself whistle, cords the bag round and round, and ties sundry hard knots at intervals. His precautions call forth the execrations of Dr. Slop, who in vain endeavours to undo the knots. He can make little use of either fingers or teeth, for his nails are pared to the quick, and three of his best teeth have been knocked out; so, taking his penknife, he hastily rips up the strings, and cuts his thumb to the bone. The unhappy man never escapes. On one occasion when Corporal Trim ventures an opinion upon a medical question, Dr. Slop interposes with disgust, and gives his own account

¹ [“The minutely described scene of Slop’s farcical tumble in the mire at the sudden turn in the road is still recognisable by any traveller approaching Sutton Vicarage from York.”—Mr. Leslie Stephen’s “Sterne,” in *Dict. Nat. Biog.*]

of the matter, couched in a jargon of unmeaning hard words.

"Now this poor fellow," he continued, pointing to the corporal, "has had the misfortune to have heard some superficial empiric discourse upon this point."

"That he has," said my father.

"Very likely," said my uncle.

"I'm sure of it," quoth Yorick.¹

Not content with ridiculing the person and pretensions of Dr. Slop, Sterne has made sport of his creed. The mockery and invective were doubtless intended to add to the humiliation of the angry Jacobite at York.

Dr. Slop is at last called upstairs to assist, and Mr. Shandy and Uncle Toby fall asleep in the parlour. Their slumbers are disturbed by the entrance of Corporal Trim.

"Pray, what's the matter? Who is there?" cried my father, waking the moment the door began to creak.

"'Tis nothing, an' please your honour," said Trim, "but two mortars I am bringing in."

"They shan't make a clatter with them here," cried my father hastily. "If Dr. Slop has any drugs to pound, let him do it in the kitchen."

"May it please your honour," cried Trim, "they are two mortar-pieces for a siege next summer, which I have been making out of a pair of jack-boots which Obadiah told me your honour had left off wearing."

"By heaven!" cried my father, springing out of his chair, "I have not one appointment belonging to me which I set so much store by as I do by these jack-boots. They were our great-grandfather's, brother Toby; they were hereditary."

"Then I fear," quoth my uncle Toby, "Trim has cut off the entail."

"I have only cut off the tops, an' please your honour," cried Trim.

"These jack-boots," continued my father, smiling, though very angry at the same time, "have been in the family ever since the Civil Wars. Sir Roger Shandy wore them at the battle of

¹ [*Tristram Shandy*, vol. vi. chap. xl.]

Marston Moor. I declare I would not have taken ten pounds for them."

"I'll pay you the money, brother Shandy," quoth my uncle Toby, looking at the two mortars with infinite pleasure, and putting his hand into his breeches pocket as he viewed them, "I'll pay you the ten pounds this moment, with all my heart and soul."¹

It was part of Sterne's scheme, for the ridicule of pedantry, that Mr. Shandy's notions should be invariably thwarted, and the very opposite of what he wished ensue. He composed a treatise on the education of his son, who was totally neglected meanwhile, and every day outgrew a page or two of the directions. The casualties of life made sad havoc with some of the choicest points of the old man's philosophy. He believed in the virtue of a well-formed nose, and the first incident in young Tristram's history is that he suffers mutilation of this essential part.

"Prithee, Trim," said my father, "who's in the kitchen?"

"There is no one soul in the kitchen," answered Trim, making a low bow as he spoke, "except Dr. Slop."

"Why, I thought Dr. Slop had been above stairs with my wife, and so said you. What can the fellow be puzzling about in the kitchen?"

"He is busy, an' please your honour," replied Trim, "in making a bridge."

"'Tis very obliging in him," quoth my uncle Toby, whose mind reverted at the word to the fortifications in the bowling-green; "pray give my humble service to Dr. Slop, Trim, and tell him I thank him heartily."

"This unfortunate drawbridge of yours," quoth my father——

"God bless your honour," cried Trim, "'tis a bridge for master's nose. In bringing him into the world with his vile instruments, he has crushed his nose, Susannah says, as flat as a pancake, to his face, and he is making a false bridge, with a piece of cotton, and a thin piece of whalebone out of Susannah's stays, to raise it up."

"Lead me, brother Toby," cried my father, "to my room this instant."²

¹ [Vol. iii. chap. xxii.]

² [Vol. iii. chaps. xxiii., xxvi., xxvii.]

The christening defeated another of Mr. Shandy's hopes and cherished theories. He has arrived at the conclusion that Trismegistus is the most propitious name in the world, and Tristram the least. The nursemaid enters his room, while he is in bed, and tells him that the child is taken alarmingly ill.

"Then reach me my breeches off the chair," said my father to Susannah.

"There is not a moment's time to dress you, sir," cried Susannah. "Bless me, sir, the child's in a fit."

"And where's Mr. Yorick?"

"Never where he should be," said Susannah, "but his curate's in the dressing-room, with the child upon his arm, waiting for the name; and my mistress bid me run as fast as I could to know, as Captain Shandy is the godfather, whether it should not be called after him?"

"Were one sure," said my father to himself, scratching his eye-brow, "that the child was expiring, one might as well compliment my brother Toby as not, and it would be a pity, in such a case, to throw away so great a name as Trismegistus upon him. But he may recover—No, no," said my father to Susannah, "I'll get up."

"There's no time," cried Susannah, "the child's as black as my shoe."

"*Trismegistus*," said my father. "But stay, thou art a leaky vessel, Susannah," added my father; "canst thou carry Trismegistus in thy head the length of the gallery without scattering?"

"Can I?" cried Susannah, shutting the door in a huff.

"If she can I'll be shot," said my father, bouncing out of bed in the dark, and groping for his breeches.

Susannah ran with all speed along the gallery. My father made all possible speed to find his breeches. Susannah got the start, and kept it.

"'Tis *Tris* something," cried Susannah.

"There is no christian name in the world," said the curate, "beginning with *Tris*, but Tristram."

"Then it is Tristram-gistus," quoth Susannah.

"There is no *gistus* to it, noodle! 'tis my own name," replied the curate, dipping his hand, as he spoke, into the basin.

"Tristram," said he, etc., etc., etc. So Tristram was I called, and Tristram shall I be to the day of my death.

My father followed Susannah, with his night-gown across his arm, with nothing more than his breeches on. "She has not forgot the name," cried my father, half opening the door.

"No, no," said the curate, with a tone of intelligence.

"And the child is better," cried Susannah.¹

It is morning, and Mr. Shandy and Uncle Toby have just come downstairs.

"If my wife will but venture him, brother Toby, Trismegistus shall be dressed and brought down to us, whilst you and I are getting our breakfasts together. Go, tell Susannah, Obadiah, to step here."

"She is run upstairs," answered Obadiah, "this very instant, sobbing and crying, and wringing her hands as if her heart would break."

"We shall have a rare month of it," said my father, turning his head from Obadiah, and looking wistfully in my uncle Toby's face for some time. "And what's the matter, Susannah?"

"They have called the child Tristram, and my mistress is just got out of an hysteric fit about it.—No! 'tis not my fault," said Susannah. "I told him it was Tristram-gistus."

"Make tea for yourself, brother Toby," said my father, taking down his hat; but how different from the sallies and agitations of voice and members which a common reader would imagine; for he spake in the sweetest modulation, and took down his hat with the genteelst movement of limbs that ever affliction harmonised and attuned together.

"Go to the bowling-green for Corporal Trim," said my uncle Toby, speaking to Obadiah, as soon as my father left the room."²

The disconsolate exit of Mr. Shandy, who is too much subdued by his misfortune to resent it, leaves the course clear for the Captain to ride his own hobby, and it is with this thought in his mind that he sends for Trim into the parlour to talk over with him, as he breakfasts, the operations in the bowling-green. The Corporal has his

¹ [Vol. iv. chap. xiv.]

² [Vol. iv. chap. xvi.]

reasons for supposing that he is summoned on a different account, and the dialogue opens with that ludicrous misconception of each other's meaning, which is the commonest species of humour with Sterne.

"Your honour," said Trim, shutting the parlour-door before he began to speak, "has heard, I imagine, of this unlucky accident."

"Oh yes, Trim," said my uncle Toby, "and it gives me great concern."

"I am heartily concerned too, but I hope your honour," replied Trim, "will do me the justice to believe that it was not in the least owing to me."

"To thee, Trim!" cried my uncle Toby, looking kindly in his face, "'twas Susannah's and the curate's folly betwixt them."

"What business could they have together, an' please your honour, in the garden?"

"In the gallery thou meanest," replied my uncle Toby.

Trim found he was upon a wrong scent, and stopped short with a low bow. "Two misfortunes," quoth the Corporal to himself, "are twice as many, at least, as are needful to be talked over at one time. The mischief the cow has done in breaking into the fortifications may be told his honour hereafter." Trim's casuistry and address, under the cover of his low bow, prevented all suspicion in my uncle Toby, so he went on with what he had to say to Trim as follows.

"For my own part, Trim, though I can see little or no difference betwixt my nephew's being called Tristram or Trismegistus, yet as the thing sits so near my brother's heart, Trim, I would freely have given a hundred pounds rather than it should have happened."

"A hundred pounds! an' please your honour," replied Trim. "I would not give a cherry-stone to boot."

"Nor would I, Trim, upon my own account," quoth my uncle Toby; "but my brother, whom there is no arguing with in this case, maintains that a great deal more depends, Trim, upon a christian name than what ignorant people imagine; for he says there never was a great or heroic action performed since the world began by one called Tristram. Nay, he will have it, Trim, that a man can neither be learned, nor wise, nor brave."

"'Tis all fancy, an' please your honour. I fought just as well

when the regiment called me Trim, as when they called me James Butler.”¹

“And for my own part,” said my uncle Toby, “though I should blush to boast of it myself, Trim, yet had my name been Alexander, I could have done no more at Namur than my duty.”

“Bless your honour!” cried Trim, advancing three steps as he spoke, “does a man think of his christian name when he goes upon the attack?”

“Or when he stands in the trench, Trim?” cried my uncle Toby, looking firm.

“Or when he enters a breach?” said Trim, pushing in between two chairs.

“Or forces the lines?” cried my uncle, rising up, and pushing his crutch like a pike.

“Or facing a platoon?” cried Trim, presenting his stick like a firelock.

“Or when he marches up the glacis?” cried my uncle Toby, looking warm, and setting his foot upon the stool.”²

The easy way in which Uncle Toby and Trim make the mania of Mr. Shandy glide into their own is exquisitely managed. But the entire passage is a dramatic masterpiece.

Mr. Shandy's aunt Dinah had bequeathed him a thousand pounds. Of the numerous cherished projects upon which he wished to lay out his legacy, the two most in favour were to send his eldest son to travel, and to bring into cultivation a piece of unenclosed ground called the Ox-moor. A long conflict had been carried on in his mind between these rival schemes, and had ended in his preferring the improvement of his heir to the improvement of his estate. He was actually engaged in measuring distances upon the map, and in calculating the expense

¹ “I must here inform you,” says Sterne when first introducing Trim to the reader, “that this servant of my uncle Toby's had been a corporal in my uncle's own company. His real name was James Butler; but having got the nickname of Trim in the regiment, my uncle Toby, unless when he happened to be very angry with him, would never call him by any other name.” [Vol. ii. chap. v.]

² [Vol. iv. chap. xviii.]

of the journey from Calais to Paris, when a letter was brought to him which contained the announcement that his son was dead. Mr. Shandy was too intent upon his occupation to open the letter, and he nodded to his brother to read it.

"He's gone," said my uncle Toby.

"Where? Who?" cried my father.

"My nephew," said my uncle Toby.

"What! without leave, without money, without governor?" cried my father in amazement.

"No, he is dead, my dear brother," quoth my uncle Toby.

"Without being ill?" cried my father again.

"I dare say not," said my uncle Toby in a low voice, and fetching a deep sigh from the bottom of his heart. "He has been ill enough, poor lad! I'll answer for him, for he is dead."¹

"Philosophy," remarks Sterne, "has a fine saying for everything. For Death it has an entire set." The memory of Mr. Shandy is stored with all the common-places of the ancients on the subject, and the opportunity of delivering them swallows up the grief for the loss of his heir.

The pleasure of the harangue was as ten, and the pain of the misfortune but as five. My father gained half in half, and consequently was as well again off as if it never had befallen him.

In the course of his funeral oration, Mr. Shandy says:

"Returning out of Asia, when I sailed from Ægina towards Megara (When can this have been? thought my uncle Toby), I began to view the country round about. Ægina was behind me, Megara was before, Pyræus on the right hand, Corinth on the left. What flourishing towns now prostrate upon the earth! Alas! alas! said I to myself, that man should disturb his soul for the loss of a child, when so much as this lies awfully buried in his presence!"

Now my uncle Toby knew not that this last paragraph was an extract of Servius Sulpicius's consolatory letter to Tully, and as my father, whilst he was concerned in the Turkey trade, had

¹ [Vol. v. chap. ii.]

been three or four different times in the Levant, my uncle Toby naturally concluded that, in some one of these periods, he had taken a trip across the Archipelago into Asia; and that all this sailing affair, with Ægina behind, and Megara before, and Pyræus on the right hand, was nothing more than the true course of my father's voyage and reflections.

"And pray, brother," quoth my uncle Toby, laying the end of his pipe upon my father's hand in a kindly way of interruption, but waiting till he finished the account, "What year of our Lord was this?"

"'Twas no year of our Lord," replied my father.

"That's impossible," cried my uncle Toby.

"Simpleton!" said my father, "'twas forty years before Christ was born."

My uncle Toby had but two things for it; either to suppose his brother to be the Wandering Jew, or that his misfortunes had disordered his brain. "May the Lord of heaven and earth protect him and restore him!" said my uncle Toby, praying silently for my father, and with tears in his eyes. My father placed the tears to a proper account, and went on with his harangue with great spirit."¹

The door is ajar, and Mrs. Shandy, overhearing the declamation of her husband, stops to listen.

"I have friends, I have relations, I have three desolate children, says Socrates."

"Then," cried my mother, opening the door, "you have one more, Mr. Shandy, than I know of."

"By heaven! I have one less," said my father, getting up and walking out of the room."²

While Mr. Shandy is dealing out the choice morsels from Seneca and Cicero in the parlour, Trim is preaching a far more effective sermon in the kitchen. The servants consider the death under various aspects, as it personally affects each, till the real feeling of the Corporal masters the selfish instincts of their hearts, and compels them to pay the tribute due to mortality.

¹ [Vol. v. chap. iii.]

² [Vol. v. chap. xiii.]

"My young master in London is dead!" said Obadiah.

A green satin night-gown of my mother's, which had been twice scoured, was the first idea which Obadiah's exclamation brought into Susannah's head. Well might Locke write a chapter upon the imperfections of words.

"Then," quoth Susannah, "we must all go into mourning."

But note a second time: the word *mourning*, notwithstanding Susannah made use of it herself, failed also of doing its office. It excited not one single idea, tinged either with grey or black. All was green,—the green satin night-gown hung there still.

We had a fat, foolish scullion. My father, I think, kept her for her simplicity. She had been all autumn struggling with a dropsy.

"He is dead," said Obadiah, "he is certainly dead!"

"So am not I," said the foolish scullion.

"Here is sad news, Trim," cried Susannah, wiping her eyes, as Trim stepped into the kitchen; "Master Bobby is dead and *buried*"—the funeral was an interpolation of Susannah's—"we shall have all to go into mourning."

"I hope not," said Trim.

"You hope not!" cried Susannah earnestly.

The mourning ran not in Trim's head, whatever it did in Susannah's. "I hope," said he, explaining himself, "I hope in God the news is not true."

"I heard the letter read with my own ears," answered Obadiah; "and we shall have a terrible piece of work of it in stubbing the Ox-moor."

"Oh! he's dead," said Susannah.

"As sure," said the scullion, "as I'm alive."

Obadiah had constantly heard Mr. Shandy debating whether he would expend Aunt Dinah's thousand pounds in reclaiming the waste, or in sending his son to make the Grand Tour, and as the intelligence contained in the letter had finally decided the question, the only idea which the decease of Master Bobby presents to the man of all-work is a vision of laborious days in breaking up the stubborn moor; while Susannah's thoughts are fixed upon the green satin gown, which will become her perquisite when her mistress goes into mourning; and the dropsical

scullion congratulates herself that death has struck another, and respited her. But it is now that Trim turns the current of their contemplations from their personal interests, and calls forth their better emotions.

"He was alive last Whitsuntide!" said the coachman.

"Whitsuntide! alas!" cried Trim, extending his right arm, "What is Whitsuntide, Jonathan (for that was the coachman's name), or Shrovetide, or any tide or time past, to this? Are we not here now, continued the corporal (striking the end of his stick perpendicularly upon the floor, so as to give an idea of health and stability), and are we not (dropping his hat upon the ground) gone in a moment!"

'Twas infinitely striking! Susannah burst into a flood of tears. We are not stocks and stones. Jonathan, Obadiah, the cook-maid, all melted. The foolish fat scullion herself, who was scouring a fish-kettle upon her knees, was roused with it. The whole kitchen crowded about the corporal. There was nothing in the sentence. 'Twas one of your self-evident truths we have the advantage of hearing every day, and if Trim had not trusted more to his hat than to his head he had made nothing at all of it.

"Are we not here now," continued the corporal, "and are we not (dropping his hat plump upon the ground, and pausing before he pronounced the word) gone in a moment!"

The descent of the hat was as if a heavy lump of clay had been kneaded into the crown of it. Nothing could have expressed the sentiment of mortality, of which it was the type and forerunner, like it. His hand seemed to vanish from under it; it fell dead; the corporal's eye fixed upon it as upon a corpse; and Susannah burst into a flood of tears.

Trim took his hat off the ground, put it upon his head, and then went on with his oration upon death, in manner and form following:—

"To us, Jonathan, who know not what want or care is, who live here in the service of two of the best of masters,—I own it, that from Whitsuntide to within three weeks of Christmas,—'tis not long, 'tis like nothing; but to those, Jonathan, who know what death is, and what havoc and destruction he can make before a man can well wheel about, 'tis like a whole age. O, Jonathan! 'twould make a good-natured man's heart bleed to

consider," continued the corporal, standing perpendicularly, "how low many a brave and upright fellow has been laid since that time! And trust me, Susy," added the corporal, turning to Susannah, whose eyes were swimming in water, "before that time comes round again many a bright eye will be dim."

Susannah placed it to the right side of the page. She wept, but she curtsied too.

"Are we not," continued Trim, looking still at Susannah, "are we not like a flower of the field?"

A tear of pride stole in betwixt every two tears of humiliation, else no tongue could have described Susannah's affliction.

"Is not all flesh grass? 'Tis clay, 'tis dirt."

They all looked directly at the scullion. The scullion had just been scouring a fish-kettle. It was not fair.

"What is the finest face that ever man looked at?"

"I could hear Trim talk so for ever," cried Susannah.

"What is it! (Susannah laid her hand upon Trim's shoulder)—but *corruption*?" Susannah took it off.¹

The death of Uncle Toby, though the story does not go so far, has supplied an eloquent and pathetic passage to Tristram Shandy. Sterne suddenly breaks off in the midst of his narrative, and with great art shows us, by anticipation, the final scene.

The corporal—Tread lightly on his ashes, ye men of genius, for he was your kinsman. Weed his grave clean, ye men of goodness, for he was your brother.

But what—what is this to that future and dreaded page where I look towards the velvet pall, decorated with the military ensigns of thy master,—the first, the foremost of created beings; where I shall see thee, faithful servant! laying his sword and scabbard, with a trembling hand, across his coffin, and then returning, pale as ashes, to the door, to take his mourning-horse by the bridle, to follow his hearse, as he directed thee;—where all my father's systems shall be baffled by his sorrows, and, in spite of his philosophy, I shall behold him, as he inspects the lacquered plate, twice taking his spectacles from off his nose to wipe away the dew which nature has shed upon them. When

¹ [Vol. v. chaps. vii.-ix.]

I see him cast in the rosemary with an air of disconsolation, which cries through my ears—O Toby! in what corner of the world shall I seek thy fellow?

— Gracious powers! which erst have opened the lips of the dumb in his distress, and made the tongue of the stammerer speak plain,—when I shall arrive at this dreaded page, deal not with me then with a stinted hand.¹

No novelist has surpassed Sterne in the vividness of his descriptions, in the skill with which he selects and groups the details of his finished scenes. And yet, next to Shakespeare, he is the author who leaves the most to the imagination. "A true feeler," he says in one of his letters, "always brings half the entertainment along with him; his own ideas are only called forth by what he reads, and the vibrations within him entirely correspond with those excited. 'Tis like reading himself, and not the book."² Acting upon this admirable principle, he has the courage to trust his subtlest traits to produce their own unaided effects. *Tristram Shandy* is full of interior meanings which escape the mind on a rapid perusal, and the interest is sustained, and the pleasure increased, by the numerous beauties which keep rising into view the longer we linger over the work. It is a kindred merit that he shines in painting by single strokes. "'I have left Trim my bowling-green,' cried my uncle Toby," to give one instance out of a hundred. "My father smiled. 'I have left him, moreover, a pension,' continued my uncle Toby. My father looked grave."³ But whatever rare quality Sterne possesses, he is sure to be conspicuous for the opposite defect. Excelling often in conciseness, he is still more often minute to prolixity. With a brave abstinence from explanatory comment at one time, he indulges in it to excess at another, and by constantly taking upon himself the part of a showman, he disagreeably reminds us that the characters are his puppets. With a rare power of delineation by slight and easy touches, he yet ushers

[Vol. vi. chap. xxv.]

² [Letter cxxv.]

³ [Vol. iv. chap. iv.]

in his telling incidents with boastful pomp, and repels us by the ostentation with which he performs his feats and challenges our admiration. There is the same admixture of good and bad in his style. It is frequently deformed by insufferable affectation; and then, again, is remarkable for its purity, its ease, its simplicity, and its elegance. The composition of the inimitable story of *Le Fever* is only second to its pathos. The marble leaves, the blank chapters, the false numbering of the pages to indicate that a portion is torn away, are, with a hundred puerilities, only so many proofs that it is possible for great genius to be combined with equal folly. His propensity to provoke curiosity for the mere pleasure of balking it, by running off into digressions, is a sorry jest unworthy a man of wit, and which, however much it might amuse the writer, excites no mirth in the reader.

There are numerous citations in *Tristram Shandy* of the opinions of Greek and Latin authors, which would lead to the impression that Sterne was a scholar of deep and various learning. Dr. Ferriar¹ has shown that he got his array of authorities at second-hand, and chiefly from Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*. He did not stop with borrowed quotations. He published several passages as his own composition, which he had copied almost literally, and even had the daring to plagiarise a protest against plagiarism. "As apothecaries," says Burton, "we make new mixtures every day, pour out of one vessel into another. We weave the same web still, twist the same rope again and again." "Shall we for ever," says Sterne, "make our books as apothecaries make new mixtures, by pouring only out of one vessel into another? Are we for ever to be twisting and untwisting the same rope?"² His assumption of a learning that he did not possess, and his appropriation of sundry sentences without acknow-

¹ [Ferriar's *Illustrations of Sterne*, vol. i. p. 83, etc.]

² [Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, p. 4; *Tristram Shandy*, vol. v. chap. i. See Ferriar, vol. i. p. 94.]

ledgment, are imputations upon his honesty, but do not detract from his genius; and it is surprising that Sir Walter Scott should have considered that the plumage of Sterne owed any of its brilliancy to these petty pilferings from birds of inferior feather.¹ They amount, when put together, to very few pages, and had never been numbered among his primary beauties. In everything which has made his fame—in his characters, his style, his humour, his pathos, there is no more original writer in the world. Where he imitates most palpably he commonly mimics defects. His admiration of Rabelais, of whom Pope well said that he oscillated between some meaning and no meaning, can be evidently traced;² but it is in the flights of folly which he mistook for fun.

Rabelais may have done him another disservice. He may have emboldened him to give loose to the indecorums which were engrained in his nature. If his plagiarisms are unscrupulous, the mischief stops with himself; if his nonsense is tedious, it is nevertheless harmless; but his indecency is an injury done to the world, and all the greater that it is interwoven with beauties which will not suffer it to die. To a lady, who told him that she had not read *Tristram Shandy* because she had heard it was not fit to be read, he is said to have replied that his freedoms were not more unbecoming than the naked limbs of her short-frocked little boy, who was rolling at the moment on the floor.³ If the comparison had been just, it might still have been objected to him that a liberty which was inoffensive in a family circle would have been an unseemly exhibition on a public stage. But the alleged parallel was altogether false. There is nothing childlike in the licence of Sterne. His wantonness is often of the grossest description, and he introduces it with a frequency, and dwells upon it with a zest, which shows that his tastes were

¹ [Scott's *Miscellaneous Prose Works*, vol. i. p. 303.]

² [Ferriar's *Illustrations of Sterne*, vol. i. p. 46.]

³ [Scott's *Miscellaneous Prose Works*, vol. i. p. 302.]

depraved. He thought it good pleasantry to indulge in impure double meanings, and to leave blanks which would suggest indelicate ideas. He cannot even be excused by the plea that the latitude belongs to the age and not to the man, for he incurred the repeated rebukes of his contemporaries, and his sole defence was to call his assailants hypocrites and prudes. This is the ordinary retort of offenders like him. However dissolute in their language, they brand every person for a prude who is not as reckless as themselves, and think to triumph over virtue by styling it hypocrisy. They would have us believe that they are not more vicious than their censors—they are only more honest. The licentiousness of Sterne has been as injurious to his literary as to his moral reputation. The exquisite conceptions with which he was inspired by his better genius would have rendered his name a household word; but the demon which tempted him to sully his page has banished from the domestic circle a work of which well-nigh half is unintelligible to the innocent and intolerable to the informed.

¶ Sterne did not in his *Sentimental Journey* give any account of the places he visited. He confined himself to recording little personal incidents, and converted each occurrence into a species of story. The manner is too pretentious for the matter. He seems by his elaborate details to promise more than he performs, and after so much preparation we are disappointed to find that it leads to nothing. Yet, notwithstanding the frequent insignificance of the result, the visible effort to work up every scene for effect destroys all confidence in his accuracy. Too tame for fiction and too theatrical for fact, the book has not the charm of either. Nowhere is the want of reality more perceptible than in the tenderness which he endeavoured to infuse into his narrative. The word *sentimental*, which he coined, and meant to be understood in a favourable sense, became from his use of it the standing epithet for feelings that are sickly and superficial. Not all the artistic

skill and power of composition will ever compensate with healthy minds for the want of nature. The Sentimental Journey is more adapted to French than to English tastes and M. Walckenaer, who only re-echoes the general opinion of his countrymen, says that it "is incomparably the best of Sterne's works."¹

Affected, morbid and hollow as a whole, there are nevertheless some portions which are charming. The scene at the opera, in Paris, is delightful for its picturesqueness, simplicity, and truth. Sterne is seated by the side of a veteran officer; and, looking down into the pit, watches the troubles of a dwarf.

The night was hot, and he was surrounded by beings two feet and a half higher than himself. The dwarf suffered inexpressibly on all sides; but the thing which incommoded him most was a tall, corpulent German, near seven feet high, who stood directly betwixt him and all possibility of his seeing either the stage or the actors. The poor dwarf did all he could to get a peep at what was going forwards, by seeking for some little opening betwixt the German's arm and his body, trying first on one side, then on the other; but the German stood square in the most unaccommodating posture that can be imagined. The dwarf might as well have been placed at the bottom of the deepest draw-well in Paris. So he civilly reached up his hand to the German's sleeve, and told him his distress. The German turned his head back, looked down upon him as Goliath did upon David,—and unfeelingly resumed his posture. . . . By this time the dwarf was driven to extremes, and in his first transports, which are generally unreasonable, had told the German he would cut off his long queue with his knife. The German looked back coolly, and told him he was welcome if he could reach it. An injury sharpened by an insult, be it to whom it will, makes every man of sentiment a party. I could have leaped out of the box to have redressed it. The old French officer did it with much less confusion; for, leaning a little over, and nodding to a sentinel, and pointing at the same time with his finger at the distress, the sentinel made his way to it. There was no occasion to tell the grievance; the thing told itself; so, thrusting back the German

¹ *Biog. Univer.* t. xliii. p. 531, Art. "Sterne."

instantly with his musket, he took the poor dwarf by the hand, and placed him before him. "This is noble!" said I, clapping my hands together. "And yet you would not permit this," said the old officer, "in England."¹

Never was an injury redressed at less inconvenience to any one; for, though the dwarf could not see over the head of the giant, the giant could see over the head of the dwarf; and suffered nothing by the change. The veteran who intimated the superiority of military despotism to British freedom forgot that the same power which interposed to correct a trifling injustice was a thousand times exerted to inflict a deadly wrong. Sterne, in one of his most famous passages, has not allowed us to forget that he was in the country of the Bastille. His family crest was a starling, selected for the punning approximation of its French name, *estourneau*, to "Sterne." This bird learns to talk as readily as the parrot, and was formerly kept for the sake of the accomplishment. Hotspur exclaims, in his threats against Henry IV.:—

Nay, I will have a starling taught to speak
Nothing but Mortimer, and give it him
To keep his anger still in motion.²

The starling which Sterne saw, or feigns to have seen, in the hotel at Paris had belonged to an Englishman, and the few words it uttered were in the English tongue.

I was intercepted, as I stepped into the courtyard, with a voice which I took to be that of a child, which complained "it could not get out." I looked up and down the passage, and seeing neither man, woman, nor child, I went out without further attention. In my return back through the passage I heard the same words repeated twice over, and, looking up, I saw it was a starling hung in a little cage. "I can't get out; I can't get out," said the starling. I stood looking at the bird; and to every person who came through the passage it ran fluttering to the side towards which they approached it, with the same lamentation of

¹ ["Paris—The Dwarf," *Works*, vol. v. p. 114.]

² First Part of *Henry IV.*, Act I., Scene iv.

its captivity. "I can't get out," said the starling. "God help thee!" said I, "but I'll let thee out, cost what it will." So I turned about the cage to get the door: it was twisted and double twisted so fast with wire, there was no getting it open without pulling the cage to pieces. I took both hands to it. The bird flew to the place where I was attempting his deliverance; and, thrusting his head through the trellis, pressed his breast against it, as if impatient. "I fear, poor creature," said I, "I cannot set thee at liberty." "No," said the starling, "I can't get out; I can't get out." . . . The bird in his cage pursued me into my room. I sat down close by my table, and leaning my head upon my hand, I began to figure to myself the miseries of confinement. I was in a right frame for it, and so I gave full scope to my imagination. I was going to begin with the millions of my fellow-creatures born to no inheritance but slavery; but finding, however affecting the picture was, that I could not bring it near me, and that the multitude of sad groups in it did but distract me, I took a single captive, and, having first shut him up in his dungeon, I then looked through the twilight of his grated door to take his picture. I beheld his body half wasted away with long expectation and confinement, and felt what kind of sickness of the heart it was which arises from hope deferred. Upon looking nearer, I saw him pale and feverish; in thirty years the western breeze had not once fanned his blood; he had seen no sun, no moon, in all that time; nor had the voice of friend or kinsman breathed through his lattice. His children—— But here my heart began to bleed, and I was forced to go on with another part of the portrait. He was sitting upon the ground upon a little straw in the furthest corner of his dungeon, which was alternately his chair and bed. A little calendar of small sticks was laid at the head, notched all over with the dismal days and nights he had passed there. He had one of these little sticks in his hand, and with a rusty nail he was etching another day of misery to add to the heap. As I darkened the little light he had, he lifted up a hopeless eye towards the door, then cast it down, shook his head, and went on with his work of affliction. I heard his chains upon his legs, as he turned his body to lay his little stick upon the bundle. He gave a deep sigh. I saw the iron enter into his soul. I burst into tears.¹ f

¹ [*Works*, vol. v. pp. 135-139.]

The description of the prisoner is quoted by Dugald Stewart, in his *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind*, as a beautiful illustration of the power of the imagination in conjuring up circumstances which awaken sensibility.¹ They must, indeed, be master-strokes which in half a dozen sentences could convey such an intense impression of the miseries of a dungeon.

The Sermons of Sterne were admired by Gray. The infidelity which prevailed at the beginning of the eighteenth century decided, for a long course of years, the character of our divinity, which, to meet the evil, turned more upon the evidences than the doctrines of Christianity. The practice continued when the cause had ceased, and, being caught up from published sermons addressed to educated men, descended to country parishes, where the objections had never been felt and the refutation was not understood. Gray was of opinion that these logical displays, which had been, he said, in fashion from the time of the Revolution, were not suited to the pulpit. He thought that fancy and warmth of expression, chastened a little by the purity and severity of religion, would be more persuasive, and that the discourses of Yorick, which showed "a strong imagination and a sensible heart," were in the right direction.² It may be gathered from a passage in the portion of *Tristram Shandy* which followed close upon the first set of Sermons, that what Gray esteemed a merit had been attacked as a defect. Sterne there magnifies the overflowings of the heart, and speaks with contempt of the divinity which comes from the head. He adds:—

To preach to show the extent of our reading, or the subtleties of our wit, to parade in the eyes of the vulgar, with the beggarly

¹ *Collected Works*, vol. ii. p. 452.

² ["Have you read his Sermons (with his own comic figure at the head of them)? They are in the style, I think, most proper for the pulpit, and show a very strong imagination and a sensible heart. But you see him often tottering on the verge of laughter, and ready to throw his periwig in the face of his audience."—Gray to Wharton, July, 1760, *Works*, vol. iii. p. 251.]

accounts of a little learning, tinselled over with a few words which glitter but convey little light and less warmth, is a dishonest use of the poor single half-hour in a week which is put into our hands. 'Tis not preaching the Gospel, but ourselves. "For my own part," continued Yorick, "I had rather direct five words point-blank to the heart."

As Yorick pronounced the word *point-blank*, my uncle Toby rose up to say something upon projectiles.¹

When Mr. Wickins, a respectable draper in Lichfield, produced to Johnson the Sermons of Sterne, "Sir," said the Doctor, "do you ever read any others?" On Mr. Wickins replying that he read Sherlock, Tillotson, and Beveridge, Dr. Johnson rejoined, "Ay, sir, *there* you drink the cup of salvation to the bottom; here you have merely the froth from the surface."² Considered strictly as *sermons*, the estimate of them by Dr. Johnson is to our thinking juster than that of Gray. They contain very little of the doctrines of Christianity, nor is its morality set forth with fulness and precision. Their merit is in the occasional bursts of rhetoric, and in pretty sentiments very sweetly expressed. The charming protest against solitude is an example:

Let the torpid monk seek heaven comfortless and alone. God speed him! For my own part, I fear, I should never so find the way. Let me be wise and religious, but let me be man. Wherever Thy Providence places me, or whatever be the road I take to get to Thee, give me some companion in my journey, be it only to remark to, How our shadows lengthen as the sun goes down! to whom I may say, How fresh is the face of nature! How sweet the flowers of the field! How delicious are these fruits!³

Cowper, the happier part of whose life is epitomised in these words, and who had practically more of the feeling they express than the genius who conceived them,

¹ [*Tristram Shandy*, vol. iv. chap. xxvi.]

² [*Johnsoniana*, No. 377.]

³ [Serm. xviii., *Works*, vol. vii. p. 61.]

attempted to compress the idea into verse, and marred it in the process:—

I praise the Frenchman,¹ his remark was shrewd,
How sweet, how passing sweet, is solitude !
But grant me still a friend in my retreat,
Whom I may whisper—Solitude is sweet.²

The deceit practised upon Jacob by Laban in imposing Leah upon him in the place of Rachel suggests some exquisite reflections :

And it came to pass in the morning, behold it was Leah ! And he said unto Laban, What is this that thou hast done unto me ? Did I not serve thee for Rachel ? Wherefore then hast thou beguiled me ?

Listen, I pray you, to the stories of the disappointed in marriage, collect all their complaints, hear their mutual reproaches ! Upon what fatal hinge do the greatest part of them turn ? “They were mistaken in the person.” Some disguise either of body or mind is seen through in the first domestic scuffle ; some fair ornament, perhaps the very one which won the heart—the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit—falls off. *It is not the Rachel for whom I have served. Why hast thou then beguiled me ?* Be open, be honest ; give yourself for what you are ; conceal nothing, varnish nothing ; and, if these fair weapons will not do, better not conquer at all than conquer for a day. When the night is passed ’twill ever be the same story, *And it came to pass, behold it was Leah !*

If the heart beguiles itself in its choice, and imagination will give excellences which are not the portion of flesh and blood ; when the dream is over, and we awake in the morning, it matters little whether ’tis Rachel or Leah. Be the object what it will, as it must be on the earthly side, at least, of perfection, it will fall short of the work of fancy, whose existence is in the clouds. In such cases of deception, let no man exclaim, as Jacob does

¹ The reference is to La Bruyère in Southey’s edition of Cowper. But the sentiment is in Balzac, and is therefore earlier than La Bruyère : “La solitude est certainement une belle chose ; mais il y a plaisir d’avoir quelqu’un qui sache répondre, à qui on puisse dire de temps en temps que c’est une belle chose.” (St. Beuve, *Port Royal*, t. ii. p. 67.)

² [Cowper’s *Retirement*.]

in his, *What is it thou hast done unto me?* for 'tis his own doing, and he has nothing to lay his fault on, but the heat and poetic indiscretion of his own passions.¹

In his sermon on Paul before Felix, after relating the apostle's triumphant refutation of the Jews who accused him, Sterne breaks out into this fine exclamation:—

There was, however, still one adversary in the court, though silent, yet not satisfied. Spare thy eloquence, Tertullus! roll up the charge! a more notable orator than thyself is risen up—'tis AVARICE, and that, too, in the most fatal place for the prisoner it could have taken possession of—'tis in the heart of the man who judges him.²

He is treading on the confines which separate eloquence from bombast, but keeps within the boundary. His character of Shimei—which he considers to have been that of a time-server—is in more questionable taste, though still evincing an unusual power and felicity of expression :

In every profession you see a Shimei following the wheels of the fortunate through thick mire and clay. Haste, Shimei! haste! or thou wilt be undone for ever. Shimei girdeth up his loins, and speedeth after him. Behold the hand which governs everything takes the wheels from off his chariot, so that he who driveth driveth on heavily. Shimei doubles his speed, but 'tis the contrary way; he flies like the wind over a sandy desert, and the place thereof shall know it no more. Stay, Shimei! 'tis your patron, your friend, your benefactor; 'tis the man who has raised you from the dunghill! 'Tis all one to Shimei. Shimei is the barometer of every man's fortune, marks the rise and fall of it, with all the variations from scorching hot to freezing cold upon his countenance, that the smile will admit of. Is a cloud upon thy affairs? See, it hangs over Shimei's brow. Hast thou been spoken for to the king or the captain of the host without success? Look not into the court calendar; the vacancy is filled up in Shimei's face. Art thou in debt? Though not to Shimei—no matter—the worst officer of the law shall not be more insolent.

¹ [Serm. xxii., vol. vii. p. 138.]

² [Serm. xix., vol. vii. p. 77.]

What then, Shimei, is the guilt of poverty so black, is it of so general a concern, that thou and all thy family must rise up as one man to reproach it? When it lost everything did it lose the right to pity too? Trust me, ye have much to answer for; it is this treatment which it has ever met with from spirits like yours which has gradually taught the world to look upon it as the greatest of evils, and shun it as the worst disgrace." ¹

There are not many pages so striking as these, but there is much of the same description, which pleases at the outset and finally cloy.

Gray mentions among the characteristics of the sermons of Mr. Yorick, that he seems "often tottering on the verge of laughter, and ready to throw his periwig in the face of the audience." It is chiefly at the opening of his discourses that he manifests this disposition. He takes for his text the verse from Ecclesiastes, *It is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting*; and his first words are, "That I deny. But let us hear the wise man's reasoning upon it,—*for that is the end of all men, and the living will lay it to his heart: sorrow is better than laughter*—for a crack-brained order of Carthusian monks, I grant, but not for men of the world." ² After proceeding for a page or two in the same strain, it appears that he is speaking in the name of the sensualist, and that it is only an artifice to startle the wondering reader. Such arts are as much below the dignity of genius as the solemnity of the pulpit. His tricks to astonish, and the exaggerations of his rhetoric, attracted additional notice by their strangeness when they were new, but they have been almost fatal to his permanent reputation; and no writer in the language, of equal excellence, has suffered so much from the want of a continuous faith in the power of sense, simplicity, and nature.

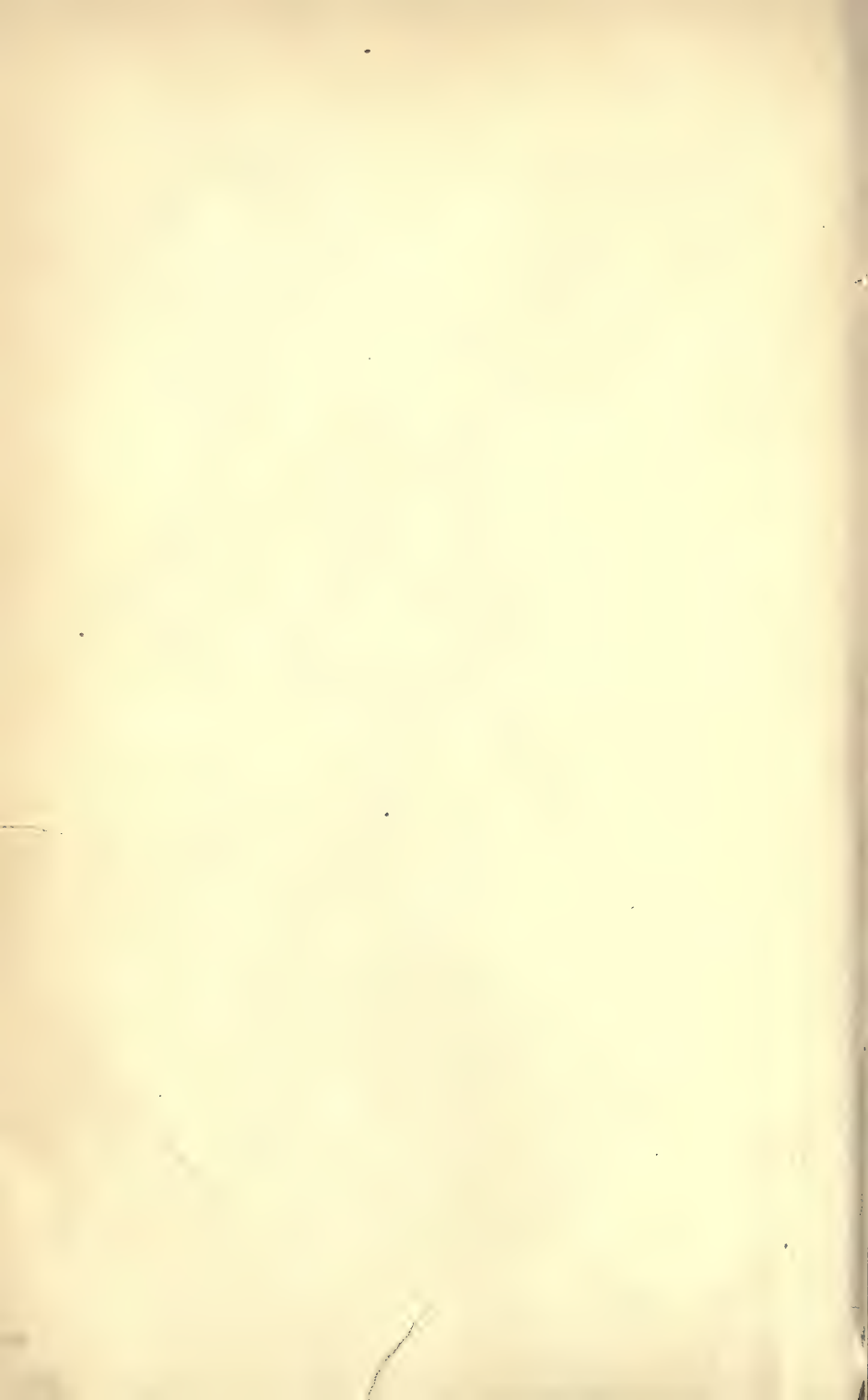
The lives of men of genius have been constantly a deplorable struggle with circumstances. It was otherwise

¹ [Serm. xvi., vol. vii. p. 27.]

² [Serm. ii., vol. vi. p. 21.]

with Sterne. He started in manhood with a happy home, a competent income, a profession which more than any other placed him above the strife and anxieties of the world. He had married the lady of his choice; no misfortune had ever visited him; he was blessed with a sanguine disposition and extraordinary talents. With every opportunity to use his gifts he had likewise the rare felicity of leisure to enjoy them. Yet with these multiplied advantages there is no more melancholy history, and it can only be read with mingled feelings of pity and indignation. For years the most popular author of his day, and ranking still among the geniuses of his country, he has curiously verified the prediction which Eugenius, in *Tristram Shandy*, made to Yorick—or, to translate fiction into fact, which Hall-Stevenson made to Sterne: "Thè fortunes of thy house shall totter; thy character, which led the way to them, shall bleed on every side of it; thy faith questioned, thy works belied, thy wit forgotten, thy learning trampled on."¹ //

¹ [*Tristram Shandy*, vol. i. chap. xii.]



FIELDING

THE essay on Fielding was published in the Quarterly Review for December, 1855. From two letters written to Elwin by Mr. Matthew Davenport Hill, Commissioner of Bankrupts at Bristol, and previously Recorder of Birmingham, it may be gathered that the author intended to return to the subject in a further paper. The sketch having, in brief, covered the whole ground, it is not very apparent what room there was for a second instalment, and this may have hindered its execution. Another project was for the separate publication of the article, and it was interleaved for the purpose. A few trifling emendations are, however, all the revision it received. A page of criticism upon Lawrence's *Life of Fielding*, which was chosen to put at the head of the review, is omitted from the present reprint.

The references to Fielding's *Works*, now appended to the essay, are to Dr. Chalmers's reprint, in 1806, of Murphy's edition of 1762, with Murphy's Memoir of Fielding prefixed.

FIELDING

HENRY FIELDING was the great-grandson of the Earl of Desmond, who was a son of the Earl of Denbigh. The peer of the novelist's generation asked him why they wrote their names differently, the elder line adhering to the old usage of placing the *e* before the *i* (Feilding). "I cannot tell, my lord," replied Henry, "except it be that my branch of the family were the first that knew how to spell."¹ The Earls of Denbigh derived their origin from the House of Habsburg, which supplied emperors to Germany and kings to Spain; and Gibbon employed the circumstance to point his celebrated eulogy upon our immortal countryman: "The successors of Charles the Fifth may disdain their brethren of England; but the romance of Tom Jones, that exquisite picture of human manners, will survive the palace of the Escorial and the imperial eagle of the House of Austria."²

This founder of a glory more durable than that of kings was born at Sharpham Park, in Somersetshire, on the 22nd of April, 1707. His father, Edmund, served under the Duke of Marlborough, and subsequently rose to the rank of lieutenant-general; his mother was a daughter of Mr. Justice Gould. In addition to the novelist, a son and four daughters³ were the issue of the marriage. When Henry's mother died, the widower took a second wife, by whom he had six sons. This lady also preceded

¹ [Nichols's *Literary Anecdotes*, vol. iii. p. 384.]

² [Gibbon's *Miscellaneous Works*, vol. i. p. 415.]

³ [*i.e.* four who grew up; a fifth died in childhood.]

the general to the tomb, and before his own death, in 1741, he had married a third and fourth time.

Henry was first instructed at home by Mr. Oliver, a clergyman, the original of Parson Trulliber, in Joseph Andrews. Although the minister of the parish, he is described in the novel as devoting his whole attention to farming, and as personally superintending its most groveling details. His build, habits, and conversation, all partake of his agricultural calling. In a word, he is a mean, ignorant farmer, in Orders. It may be inferred from this satirical sketch, however embellished in the details, that young Fielding received from him neither knowledge nor kindness, and the only benefit he probably did his pupil was the unintentional service of furnishing him with the materials for his ludicrous portrait.

Henry was next sent to Eton, where he formed an acquaintance with several persons who were afterwards distinguished. One of these was the future great commoner, Mr. Pitt. Fielding soon repaired, at this celebrated seminary, the neglect of Mr. Oliver, and became conspicuous among his fellows for his knowledge of the Greek and Latin classics. How deeply his mind was imbued with them, how heartily he admired and how much he had profited by them, is evident in all his happiest works. He has, indeed, been accused of a tendency to pedantry; but what with some men is ostentation was, in his case, the simple application of materials which early habit had made so familiar that they had lost their learned air, and were entirely native to him.

From Eton, when he was about eighteen years of age, he went to Leyden, where for two years he studied civil law with the diligence of a man who was seriously bent on qualifying himself for his profession. He was then compelled to return to England by the inability of his father to supply him with funds. His biographer, Murphy, laments this interruption to his education, because "an ampler store of knowledge might have given such a

complete improvement to his talents as would afterwards have shone forth with still greater lustre in his writings.”¹ No observation could be less appropriate. The sky is not more dotted with stars than the works of Fielding with learning; his style shows that he had sedulously trained himself in the school of the best masters, and his own consummate genius did the rest. It could have added nothing to his reputation if, drawing the mass of his ideas from books instead of from nature and imagination, he had shone with a borrowed and not an inherent lustre. But what for his own sake is to be regretted is that, forced from the steady prosecution of the law, he should have been cast into a career which fostered his tendency to an irregular and licentious life. He arrived in the capital his own master when he was not yet twenty-one. His father was as unable to support him in London as in Leyden; and though the general was good enough to allow him £200 a year, his son used to say that “anybody might pay it who would.”² In this situation he had no other resource, to use his own expression, than “to become a hackney writer or a hackney coachman.”³ The alternations of luxury and misery which were the result of the precarious subsistence of the authors of that day who lived by their wits, have been vividly described by Macaulay.⁴ Deprivation only served to sharpen their desires, and when they made a lucky hit they rushed into the extremes of extravagance and debauchery to slake the cravings engendered by an enforced self-denial. To no one was the temptation stronger than to Fielding. He had a constitution which was keenly alive to sensual delights, and a temperament too gross to be repelled by accessories which would have shocked finer tastes.

¹ [*Essay on the Life and Genius of Henry Fielding*, Fielding's *Works*, ed. 1806, vol. i. p. 8.]

² [*Ibid.*, p. 11.]

³ [*Letters of Lady Mary Montagu*, ed. 1837, vol. iii. p. 93.]

⁴ [Macaulay's *Essays*, ed. 1853, vol. i. pp. 379-81.]

Vice—vulgar, dirty, and in rags—was not less welcome to him than when decked out in the gayest and most alluring garb. The intoxication of superiority gave an additional piquancy to his love of conviviality. His enlivening talk and exuberant spirits rendered him the king of his company, and he was equally courted by men of pleasure and men of letters. Lord Lyttelton declared that he had more wit and humour in conversation than Pope, Swift, and all the other celebrities of that brilliant time put together. He began by attaching himself to the dramatic department of literature, which brought him into close contact with the loose society which then haunted the theatres, and was one more pitfall in a path which at best was beset with dangers. The necessities which were the bane of his character were the stimulants of his genius; and, had his circumstances been happier, the novelist might have been lost in the politician or judge, as Ovids and Martials were lost in Pulteney and Murray.

That a youth little more than twenty, disappointed of his remittances, should come to London determined to support himself by his pen, instead of returning to his father's house, would be evidence of an heroic energy and independence; but there can be little question that his bias was in the same direction, and that literature had from the outset disputed the supremacy with law. In the preface to a play, entitled *Don Quixote in England*, which was produced at the Haymarket in 1733, he states that the opening scenes were sketched at Leyden. Yet even this was not his first performance, for, in adding that it "was written before *most* of the pieces with which he had endeavoured to entertain the public," he lets us see that it had more than one predecessor. Indeed the fact that *Love in Several Masques*—the comedy which introduced him to the world—was acted in the beginning of 1728, is a proof that it must have been prepared before he arrived in London. It bears too many marks of the file to have

been hastily composed ; and the wonder is, that, being yet unknown to fame, the short interval which elapsed between his return from Leyden and its performance should have sufficed to get it read, considered, accepted, and rehearsed.

In plot, dialogue, and characters, *Love in Several Masques* is moulded upon the plays of Congreve. There is little heart in the construction, little probability in the incidents, and nothing natural in the personages of the piece. The men and women are a set of puppets, who utter witty similes and epigrammatic conceits. Every speech is studied and artificial, and the head takes no counsel of the heart. The lovers seem without feeling, the very intriguers without passion. It is a cold, unreal, insipid world, and we soon grow tired of listening to the laboured talk of these pretentious phantoms. The comedy does not in our day appear more diverting for two or three coarse caricatures which amused a licentious and disgust a decent generation. Fielding boasts, in his preface, that he was the youngest author who had ever produced a piece upon the stage,¹ and, notwithstanding all its defects, it afforded, his years considered, extraordinary promise, from the power of language, witticism, and composition displayed in the dialogue. Even in these particulars it fell short of the *Old Bachelor* of his model, Congreve, who was long supposed to have been only twenty-one when his first play was performed ; but from the date of his birth, which has since been recovered, it is now known that he was twenty-four ; and, though he asserted that it was written some years before it was acted, it is certain that he would revise it to the best of his ability when he gave it to the world. Thus the wonder is less than if the entire comedy had been composed when it appeared. He had a longer period for consideration, he could review his own work with comparative impartiality, and he had the advantage of a settled framework, to which he could attach the observations of increasing experience, and

¹ [*Works*, vol. i. p. 89.]

the bright sallies which from time to time arose in his mind.

The first efforts of genius are usually imitative. It aspires to rival what has most attracted it in favourite authors, and acquires the skill in the attempt which afterwards enables it to give shape to its own imaginings. This was the service which Fielding derived from Congreve. He lived to prove that his wit was far racier and more abundant than that of his master, but the master in his own inferior kind was never reached by his pupil. Fielding was not long in breaking loose from the trammels he had imposed on himself. The mannerism is less visible in his next comedy, the *Temple Beau*, and soon entirely ceased. The antithetical wit of Congreve required time and thought for its production, and the haste with which Fielding dashed off his pieces, when he was fairly embarked in his career, compelled him to follow the spontaneous current of his ideas. When he undertook to furnish a play he would go home late from a tavern, and the next morning hand a scene to the actors, written upon the paper which had wrapped his tobacco. He commonly completed a farce in two or three days.¹ His cousin, Lady Mary Wortley,² says that necessity forced him to throw many productions into the world which he would have thrown into the fire, if meat could have been got without money, and money without scribbling. Rather they would not have been written at all, and it was love of ease more than want of leisure which led him to put forth these hurried effusions. The intervals between his plays show that this extreme rapidity of composition could only have been occasioned by his aversion to work till compelled by poverty. To the other causes for his carelessness Mr. Murphy adds, that he had a sovereign contempt for

¹ [Murphy, vol. i. pp. 43, 21.]

² Lady Mary Wortley was the great-granddaughter of that same Earl of Desmond of whom Henry Fielding was the great-grandson. The maiden name of her mother, the Duchess of Kingston, was Mary Fielding.

the understanding of his audience, and believed them incapable of discriminating between the finest and coarsest strokes of his pen. Garrick begged him to erase a passage from the *Wedding Day*, which the actor predicted would provoke opposition. "No," replied Fielding, "if the scene is not a good one, let *them* find *that* out." On the first night of the piece the author sat in the green-room drinking champagne, when Garrick entered flustered from the stage. "What's the matter?" said Fielding, cocking his eye at him; "what are they hissing now?" "Why, the scene that I begged you to retrench, and they have so frightened me that I shall not be able to collect myself again the whole night." "Oh, they *have* found it out, have they?" calmly replied the philosophic author.¹

When every allowance has been made it must still be confessed that his genius was not dramatic. Of the ingredients which enter into a sterling comedy—plot, characters, incident, conversation, humour—not one was wanting in him; but these qualities assume different forms in novels, in which he so mightily excelled, from what they do in plays, in which he so egregiously failed. The novel is carried on in narrative as well as by dialogue, the play by dialogue alone: the novel is an expanded picture of life, and affords room for minute description and accumulated details; the play has to be represented at a single sitting, and requires selection and compression: the novel appeals solely to the imagination; the play is seen as well as heard. Such is the influence of the last circumstance that even the play which reads best in the closet is not always that which tells most on the stage. If Fielding's novels be examined, it will be found that their excellences are seldom of the kind which the theatre demands. He deals very largely in narrative, and his humour shines in it with peculiar lustre. Events which would be mean, trivial, or grotesque, when performed, are set off by his diverting mode of relating them, and the admirable reflec-

¹ [Murphy, vol. i. p. 41.]

tions he has based on them. Though the dialogue is exquisitely comic, it derives a considerable portion of its force from the comments which accompany it, and would lose much of its point if it stood by itself. He needed the aid of description to develop his characters and story, and could not make the speakers reveal themselves fully out of their own mouths. The conversation of his plays is too often in consequence flat and insipid, the personages are not brought out in sufficient relief, the incidents are not of a nature to tell in actual representation. Debarred from indulging in the minute particularities which give such effect to his tales, he either crowded together events which he had not space to assort and unfold, or he fell into the opposite extreme of dreary barrenness. Unable to spread his plot over an extensive surface, he was apt to disregard his fable altogether. He found it difficult in his pieces to lead the incidents up to a natural and spirited conclusion, and used to drink confusion to the man who invented fifth acts. When to these things we add that a play to be successful must throughout rouse stronger emotions than a book, where the most refined beauties are those which call forth the warmest commendation from competent judges, it is not surprising that no great novelist should yet have proved himself a great dramatist. Both depict human nature; but as the means by which they accomplish this end are in many respects unlike, whoever succeeds in performing the double part must possess two arts instead of one.

It would be idle and wearisome to criticise in detail pieces which, in the aggregate, are unworthy of their author. The few lively speeches, shrewd observations, mirthful situations, and faint outlines of genuine character, are overlaid with caricature, extravagance, nonsense, and dulness. To supply the deficiency of wit, he seasoned his plays with the grossest indecorums. The worst writers of the worst period of the Restoration are not greater offenders. Those who imagine that Jeremy Collier

banished immorality and profanity from the stage may learn from Fielding that neither audience nor author were so easily shamed. Whenever the works of the great novelist are reprinted, it is to be hoped that dramas which do dishonour to his principles, without doing credit to his talents, will be omitted from the collection. When the wine is drawn off, every reader will be glad that the dregs should be left behind.

His second comedy, the *Temple Beau*, was produced in January, 1730, and three other plays followed in the same year, of which the last was *Tom Thumb*, a farce which still retains its celebrity. Originally in one act, Fielding was induced by its popularity to expand it into three. Whatever improvements it may have received in the process, the increased length was in itself a disadvantage. Such jests grow ponderous when they are protracted. The piece is a burlesque of numerous bombastic lines in modern tragedies, with many of which no single person could possibly have been familiar even in Fielding's day, and the bulk of which are quite forgotten in ours. Much of the humour depends on a knowledge of the parallel passages; and though the author has printed them in the notes, there is more weariness than amusement in glancing incessantly from the text to the disjointed fragments of the originals at the foot of the page, which give point to the parody. In spite of some ludicrous strokes, *Tom Thumb* in its integrity is a heavy production, and is rather read for its traditional fame than for the entertainment it affords.

The dramas of Fielding had variable fates, most of them meeting with only a moderate success. He did not make another notable hit till he brought out the *Mock Doctor*, at the close of 1732, and the *Miser* at the commencement of 1733, both of them translations from the French of Molière. The *Miser*, according to Voltaire, had a run of nearly thirty nights, which, he states, was a very rare compliment in London, where the most popular

pieces were seldom performed more than fifteen times. He goes so far as to pay Fielding the tribute of saying that he had added to the original some beauties of dialogue peculiar to his nation. But these are trifles which make no sensible addition to the fame of the author of *Tom Jones*.

He next appears (1733) in the degrading light of joint-proprietor with Hyppesley, the comedian, of a booth for the performance of plays at Bartholomew Fair.¹ Many actors of respectability took advantage, in those days, of the congregation of holiday-folks, and opened these temporary theatres to catch the crowd. Yet even then it must have been thought beneath the province of a gentleman to advertise himself as the owner of a player's booth at a fair; but when his finances were exhausted he was never nice, Murphy says, in his mode of recruiting them.² He would exhibit a farce or a puppet-show at the Haymarket Theatre, to the distress of his pride, which revolted from the measures to which it stooped. He was considered to have just ideas of propriety, a high sense of the dignity of an author and a scholar, though extravagance and its attendant poverty constantly drove him to do violence to his better feelings.

Fielding had been six or seven years engaged in writing for the stage when he contracted a marriage, which for a brief period gave a total change to the current of his life. On his return from Leyden he had paid his addresses to Miss Andrews, an heiress, who lived at Lyme, with her guardian Mr. Tucker, who did not favour the suit. The lover is said to have attempted to abscond with his prize; and there is an entry in the archives of Lyme, from which it appears that the conduct of himself and his servant had inspired the guardian with apprehensions of violence

¹ [Mr. Leslie Stephen says, "It is conclusively shown by Mr. F. Latreille (*Notes and Queries*, 5th ser. iii. 502) that the booth was really kept by Timothy Fielding, an actor."—*Dict. of Nat. Biog.*, vol. xviii. p. 417.]

² [Murphy, vol. i. p. 81.]

to his person.¹ In short, Fielding at twenty-one was much what we might have expected—a young Lochinvar, dauntless, headstrong, and impetuous. He had now better fortune with Miss Cradock, of Salisbury, who was possessed of beauty and fifteen hundred pounds. He is said by Murphy to have inherited, about the same time, an estate in Dorsetshire, of two hundred a year, through the death of his mother, whom, however, he lost when he was a child of eleven.² Whatever was the family arrangement by which he came into East Stower,³ he went to reside there with his bride. He had broken away from his London haunts and associates; he was extremely attached to his wife; he had the strongest relish for literature, and found endless entertainment in books. He had leisure to indulge in his taste for authorship, and a moderate competence, which took away the necessity for undigested compositions, and would have permitted him to elaborate a work worthy of his extraordinary talents. Every element of happiness appeared to have met together, and the use he made of these gifts of fortune is an illustration of the assertion of Lady Mary Wortley, that “he would have wanted money if his hereditary lands had been as extensive as his imagination.”⁴ “He encumbered himself,” says Murphy, “with a large retinue of servants, all clad in costly yellow liveries. For their master’s honour these people could not descend so low as to be careful in their apparel, but in a month or two were unfit to be seen; the squire’s dignity required that they should be new equipped; and, his chief pleasure consisting in society and convivial mirth, he hospitably

¹ These particulars were communicated to the *Athenæum* by Mr. George Roberts, formerly Mayor of Lyme.

² [Murphy, vol. i. p. 44.]

³ [Printed “Stour” in the original article, perhaps owing to the name being so spelt in the record of his entry at the Middle Temple. But the place is indicated as “Stower” both in Murphy’s contemporary biography and in the usage of the present day.]

⁴ [Scott’s *Fielding; Miscellaneous Prose Works*, vol. i. p. 254.]

threw open his doors, and, in less than three years, entertainments, hounds, and horses entirely devoured a little patrimony which, had it been managed with economy, might have secured him a state of independence for the rest of his life."¹ It will be seen from this that he was not one of those petty spendthrifts who waste away their substance by gradual encroachments. He was a daring and determined prodigal, who made no attempt to apportion his rate of living to his means, but started at once upon a scale which he was conscious must reduce him to almost instant beggary. The experience which genius buys it can afterwards sell, and we may presume that it was during this period that he became acquainted with Squire Western and the other country characters who have made his novels immortal.

Though Murphy asserts that Fielding continued his East Stower establishment for nearly three years, it is doubtful if he retained it more than one, for, in 1736 he — was in London, renting the little theatre at the Haymarket, and presiding over a motley company of comedians. Here he produced his *Pasquin*, "a Dramatic Satire on the Times," of which the most piquant portions related to the bribery practised at elections. The play has several bright and pungent touches, with a large alloy of the wildest absurdities. What was wanting of the zest of wit was supplied by the virulence of party, and the piece was performed for more than fifty nights. Fielding resolved to work the political vein upon which he had hit, and in the beginning of 1737 he brought out at his theatre the *Historical Register for 1736*. In this farce he introduced, under the name of *Quidam*, Sir Robert Walpole himself, who is represented as bribing pretended patriots. Five years before he had dedicated the comedy of the *Modern Husband* to the great minister, and, with the usual appendage of compliments, had appealed to him to protect the Muses, and talked of the time "when envy

¹ [Murphy, vol. i. p. 44.]

should cease to misrepresent his actions, and ignorance to misapprehend them.”¹ Envy and ignorance nevertheless had now an ally in the disappointed dedicator. The “wise statesman,” as he termed him, had not thought proper, in his wisdom, to respond to the call, and the greatest objection, it is to be feared, which Fielding felt to his reputed bounty, was that it had not been extended to himself. Or, what is just as likely, he may have had no deeper motive than to avail himself of a period of factious frenzy to season his dish to suit the palates of his audience. He at any rate returned to his first opinion, and in his latest work, penned with his dying hand, he called Sir Robert Walpole “one of the best of men and of ministers.”² In the meantime the theatrical speculation of the needy dramatist was ruined by its success. If we are to believe Cibber and other writers of the time, the Historical Register was the principal cause of that Playhouse Act, of which the Golden Rump was the pretext, and which, by requiring that every piece produced upon the stage should be licensed by the Lord Chamberlain, compelled Mr. Manager Fielding to shut up his establishment at the very moment when, taking advantage of his popularity, he was proposing a subscription to enlarge and beautify the building, and provide a company of better actors. While he was still conducting the Haymarket Theatre, a new farce from his pen was, for some reason not stated, brought out at another house, and deservedly hissed. He printed it, apparently to shame his censors, and varied the customary words on the title-page, “as it was performed,” etc., to “as it was *damned* at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane.”³ If the nonsense it contains had not been fatal to it, it ought to have been hooted for its profanity.

With his retirement from the management of the house in the Haymarket the dramatic career of Fielding came

¹ [*Works*, vol. ii. p. 158.]

² [*Voyage to Lisbon*, *Works*, vol. x. p. 266.]

³ [*Eurydice*, vol. iii. p. 359.]

virtually to a close. The *Wedding Day*, which was first brought out in 1743, and the *Good-natured Man*, which was not performed till after his death, were both early productions, and he had only a small share in the ballad-farce of *Miss Lucy in Town*, which was acted in 1742, and is the sole remaining piece connected with his name which appeared subsequent to 1737. He afterwards remarked, as an excuse for the imperfections of his plays, that he left off writing for the theatre when he ought to have begun.¹ His hand, however, had not improved with practice, nor was there anything to prevent him from repeating the experiment in the maturity of his powers, if he had anticipated a more brilliant result from his labours. He had the same motive of hunger to stimulate him, and we suspect that when he abandoned the calling he had become conscious himself that his strength lay in another direction.

Murphy relates that Fielding was never to be subdued by difficulties, which roused him, on the contrary, into facing them with peculiar energy and determination.² He loved pleasure far too well to exert himself, except when want was at his heels to urge him on, but his courage and capacity were great, and when the call was imperious he jumped up manfully and went to work like a giant. To this magnanimity in wrestling with adverse circumstances he joined a sanguine temperament, which diffused a light over the most desolate prospects. Whatever was the trial of the hour, his imagination conjured up flattering visions in the distance. No man, when fortune favoured him, found such exquisite satisfaction in the present, and when the present grew dark, he lived with a happy versatility upon the future. His situation at this crisis demanded all his hopeful and vigorous qualities to sustain his spirits. He had a wife to maintain; he had madly squandered both her fortune and his own; he had the stings of self-reproach to endure, without, that we can

¹ [Murphy, vol. i. p. 42.]

² [*Ibid.*, p. 12.]

discover, one alleviating reflection to blunt their force; he had embarked in a speculation which only succeeded by the licence he assumed, and which, when once repressed, left him without a second resource for carrying on the project. In this condition he took the valorous resolution of qualifying himself for the Bar, and became a student of the Middle Temple in November, 1737, when he was nearly thirty-one.

The weak, low spirit Fortune makes her slave :
But she's a drudge when hector'd by the brave.

None of the productions of his pen for the next two years are known, but it is certain that his earnings were his principal means of support, and he is said by Murphy to have been the author of numerous political pamphlets, some of which belonged to this period.¹ Many more of his anonymous works have never been collected, and cannot now be identified. The attempt to avert censure by concealment was so far from succeeding, that it got him the discredit of a vast amount of trash in which he had no concern; and he complained, in 1744, that he was the reputed author of half the treason, scurrility, blasphemy, and indecency, to which the last few years had given birth.² To relieve himself of the infamy of this spurious brood, he solemnly promised in 1743 that none of his children should henceforth be sent out into the world without the name of their parent;³ but, finding that his pledge did not protect him, he withdrew it a twelvemonth afterwards.⁴ There is no reason to regret the loss of occasional pamphlets which he himself was ashamed to own. They were written to get bread, and not to extort the admiration of posterity. They were thought unworthy of republication by his friends and family, who had these effusions before them; and we may easily infer, from some

¹ [Murphy, vol. i. p. 47.]

² [Preface to Miss Fielding's *David Simple*; *Works*, vol. v. p. 414.]

³ [Preface to *Miscellanies*.]

⁴ [Preface to *David Simple*; *Works*, vol. v. p. 413.]

of the pieces which have been preserved, that they would add one more to a hundred proofs that even great men can produce nothing great unless they bend their minds to their task. But what is worthy of all admiration is the self-denying bravery with which this man of pleasure, this haunter of taverns, and squanderer of thousands, now applied himself at thirty years of age to the double duty of procuring a subsistence for the day that was passing over him, and pursuing a dry, arduous, and, for the present, profitless study. He persevered nevertheless, read with remarkable intensity, and, when occasionally tempted to recreate himself with the dissipation he loved so dearly, he would sit up for hours on returning late to his chambers, and snatch from sleep the time he had given to riot. He acquired a respectable knowledge of his profession, and in particular departments was deemed a proficient. He compiled a treatise upon crown-law, in two volumes, folio, which was never printed, but which his half-brother, Sir John Fielding, the celebrated police magistrate, told Mr. Murphy was considered perfect in some of its parts.¹

Fielding was called to the Bar on the 20th of June, 1740, and at the same time retired from the management of the *Champion*, an essay-paper published three times a week, and of which he had been the principal prop since November, 1739. This is an indication that he intended to give himself up to the law, and allow no lighter pursuits to intervene. He went the Western Circuit, and was a punctual attendant at Westminster Hall, but it is doubtful whether he ever succeeded in convincing the attorneys that the writer for the stage, the lessee of a theatre, the witty town reveller, the jovial country squire who had

¹ [Murphy, *Works*, vol. i. p. 47. Mr. M. Davenport Hill wrote to Whitwell Elwin, March 27th, 1856:—"Writers of fiction are very fond of making their stories hinge on points of law. But, so far as I know, there are but two writers in our language who ever touch law without showing their ignorance on the subject. These are Shakespeare and Fielding. Walter Scott, a lawyer by profession and by office, is no exception."]

suffered horses and hounds to eat up his estate in one short season, the essayist, the pamphleteer, the author of all work, was really a plodding barrister, whose heart and head were in his profession. The jealousy with which legal practitioners regard a divided allegiance has long been proverbial, and in general they are right in the suspicion that the professors of literature give a grudging and scanty service to law. Alexander Chalmers found it related in the Annual Register for 1762 that Fielding, meeting for two or three years with no success, had recourse to the device of printing proposals for a new law-book, an undertaking which in those days was seldom ventured on, as it is at present, by raw, inexperienced, incompetent men, and the announcement being received as evidence of his learning, briefs poured in thick upon him throughout the Western Circuit at the next assizes. His practice was lost as suddenly as it was gained,¹ which shows, if there is any truth in the story, that he did not distinguish himself in the conduct of his cases. A fresh adversary shortly assailed him in the shape of gout, the fruit of his debauchery, and often obliged him to intermit his attendance on the courts. Henceforward he resigned all hope of attaining to the higher honours of his profession. He was an example of his own observation, "Means are always in our power, ends very seldom";² and notwithstanding the time and care he had spent in preparing for this promising throw, the dice had not been favourable, and he had still his living to seek. His father died in June, 1741, exactly a year after his son was called to the Bar. With his large family it was not to be expected that he could bequeath a second patrimony to the prodigal who had run through the estate at East Stower. Fielding was sensible that his father had done for him all that lay in his power; and "he was therefore," says his biographer, "never wanting in filial piety, which, his

¹ [Chalmers, Note to Murphy's *Life of Fielding*, vol. i. p. 46.]

² [*Voyage to Lisbon, Works*, vol. x. p. 287.]

nearest relations agree, was a shining part of his character."¹

During this probationary period at the Bar, Fielding still sent forth ephemeral pieces, which have sunk into a final and deserved oblivion. But the time was now come when he was to rise above the crowd of briefless barristers, Grub Street scribes, and convivial good-fellows, to all of which fraternities he belonged, and show the world what stuff he was made of. In December, 1740, appeared the celebrated *Pamela* of Richardson. The book, excellent in intention, and in some respects powerful in execution, had its ridiculous as well as its impressive side. Its popularity was great, and it was convenient to Fielding, always on the look-out for every theme which attracted public notice, to see it in its ludicrous light. He determined to make a companion story the vehicle for laughing at it. With this view he gives *Pamela Andrews*, the heroine of Richardson, a brother Joseph, whom he places in service, like his sister, and exposes to the same temptations from his mistress which she had undergone from her master. The squire in *Pamela* is called Mr. B——; Fielding fills up the blank, and christens him Mr. Booby. The moral of "*Virtue Rewarded*" is that Mr. B—— marries his maid; Fielding represents the Lady Booby of his Joseph Andrews as eager to marry her footman. The satire is very laughable and very contemptuous, and, what is singular, and a remarkable instance of tact, is that, in travestying *Pamela*, Fielding has never himself once deviated from nature. His tale is now commonly read without the least regard to the original which he ridiculed, and no one probably ever felt that the incidents needed any other justification than their intrinsic probability. He warmed with his subject as he proceeded, and, forgetting the primitive design, suspended the satire through the greater portion of the story, and only resumed it to give consistency to the work at the close. The

¹ [Murphy, vol. i. p. 11.]

scheme, however, with which he commenced, occasioned the introduction of the scenes between Joseph and Lady Booby, which are the most offensive in the book.

Fielding avowed that his intention was to imitate Cervantes,¹ and Dr. Warton professed himself unable to discover the resemblance.² It is not, indeed, very obvious, and, in so far as it exists, appears to consist in the plan rather than in the style or the incidents. Fielding made a mock of Pamela, as Cervantes, in a less censorious spirit, had extracted mirth out of books of chivalry, and both adopted the method of carrying their heroes from place to place, and rendered the journeys, and the haltings at public-houses, the means of introducing a vast variety of amusing characters and adventures. But Fielding is so much an original that, except for his own confessions, nobody would have suspected him of having worked after a model. In one particular there was a strong similarity between his literary career and that of Cervantes. The Spaniard, who was fifty-eight when he published the first part of *Don Quixote*, had, like the Englishman, written a considerable number of indifferent dramas which gave no indication of the immortal work which afterwards astonished and delighted the world. He was the author of several tales, for which even his subsequent fame can procure very few readers, and which would certainly have been forgotten if the lustre of his masterpiece had not shed its light upon everything which belonged to him. It was not till he was verging upon threescore that he hit upon the happy plan which was to exhibit his genius, and which nothing previously sufficed to display. Fielding was equally ignorant of his province. Writing for a subsistence, trying everything by turns, having the strongest

¹ [In the Preface to *Joseph Andrews* (Murphy, vol. i. p. 59). But Cervantes is not mentioned by name, and the intention seems only gathered from the general drift of Fielding's observations. Comp. *Joseph Andrews*, book iii. chap. i.]

² [Chalmers, Note to Murphy, vol. i. p. 59.]

interest in discovering how he could lay out his powers to the best advantage, he mistook his road, and only found it by chance. If Pamela had never existed, it is more than possible that English literature might have wanted Joseph Andrews, Tom Jones, and Amelia. It is not enough, we see, from the instance both of Fielding and Cervantes, to possess the deepest knowledge of life, the richest humour, and the most fertile invention. There is some special groundwork upon which alone they can be laid; and, strange to say, the owner of the gifts is often unable to discover a method by which to disburden his mind of its own abundant ideas. This may induce us to believe that the reputation of men among their contemporaries is not always ill-founded, although their works fall below, as in the case of Coleridge, the opinion which friends and acquaintances have formed of their powers. Congreve, so epigrammatic in his comedies, teeming above all with sparkling repartee, attempted to reply to the attack upon his dramas by Jeremy Collier. The pointed, provoking sarcasm of his antagonist, the expectations formed by the public of the brilliant refutation which would be made by the smartest writer of his time—then in the zenith of his fame—conspired to compel Congreve to strain every nerve in the contest, and endeavour at least to obtain that victory in wit which the badness of his cause denied him in argument. His answer, nevertheless, was as flippant and dull as if it had proceeded from Settle himself, and showed that the man who was profusely witty in a play might strive in vain, in a controversy which seemed formed to give an opening to pungent retorts, to be witty in a pamphlet.

Joseph Andrews was published in February, 1742, a little more than a twelvemonth after the appearance of Pamela. It seems to have become immediately popular, though it did not obtain the reputation we should have expected from the freshness, the vivacity, the life, the truth, the originality of the narrative, when contrasted,

with the faded, artificial, insipid tales which were then in fashion. Gray wrote word, in April, to West, that he had been reading it upon his recommendation. "The incidents," said he, "are ill laid, and without invention; but the characters have a great deal of nature, which always pleases, even in her lowest shapes. Parson Adams is perfectly well; so is Mrs. Slipslop, and the story of Wilson; and throughout he shows himself well read in stage-coaches, country squires, inns, and inns of court. His reflections upon high people and low people, and misses and masters, are very good."¹ This is cold commendation for one of the masterpieces of fiction. Parson Adams is considerably more than "perfectly well"; nor would anyone gather from the description of Gray that he was speaking of the first novel which had ever reproduced true English life—a work which had no predecessor in the language, and which remains to this hour, in its happiest portions, without a rival. He who had exclaimed in the same letter, "Be mine to read eternal new romances of Marivaux and Crébillon," might have been expected to hail in less measured terms the new romance in his own tongue, which was at the same time a sudden burst into a new and incomparable style. But the most enduring fame is often of the slowest growth; and few great writers attain to the fulness of their honours before the second generation.

Fielding stated, in his preface, that there was scarce a character or action which he had not taken from his own observation and experience; but that the persons were so disguised that it would be impossible to guess at them with certainty.² It was, however, no secret that one of his friends, Mr. Young, had sat for the portrait of the famous Parson Adams.³ Like his representative in Joseph Andrews, he overflowed with benevolence and learning,

¹ [Gray's *Works*, ed. 1849, vol. ii. p. 151.]

² [*Works*, vol. v. p. 16.]

³ [Nichols's *Literary Anecdotes*, vol. iii. p. 371.]

and, like him, was noted for his absence of mind. He had been chaplain to a regiment during Marlborough's wars; and, meditating one evening upon the glories of Nature and the goodness of Providence, he walked straight into the camp of the enemy; nor was he aroused from his reverie till the hostile sentinel shouted *Qui va là?* The commanding officer, finding that he had come among them in simplicity and not in guile, allowed him to return, and lose himself, if he pleased, in meditations on his danger and deliverance.¹ Sir Herbert Croft, in that ridiculous *Life* of the author of the *Night Thoughts*, in which he burlesqued, in attempting to imitate, the style of Dr. Johnson, says that the Young of Fielding's acquaintance "supported an uncomfortable existence by translating for the booksellers from the Greek"; and in the year in which Joseph Andrews appeared he joined with the great novelist in an English edition of the *Plutus* of Aristophanes. It is not improbable that Fielding may have lent his rising name to a work in which he had little share, to assist the friend to whom he was indebted for the conception which had most contributed to his own renown.

The hard-hearted, dishonest bailiff, Peter Pounce, was supposed to represent the Peter Walter satirised by Pope. This man, who was an attorney and steward, and at whose roguish practices the poet hints, when he says, "that he was a good, if not a safe, *conveyancer*,"² was the owner of Stalbridge Park, which was only four miles from the East Stower estate. He had undoubtedly incurred his temporary neighbour's dislike. In the *Essay on Conversation*, Fielding designates him by his initials, when, describing the wine-grudging host, he remarks that "it is as impossible to carry a pint of liquor from his house as to borrow a shilling from P—— W——,"³ The

¹ [Murphy, vol. i. p. 61.]

² [Pope's *Moral Essays*, Ep. iii., note to l. '23.]

³ [*Works*, vol. ix. p. 373.]

inconvenient proximity of P. W.'s manor of Stalbridge to the dashing young squire's horses and hounds may have occasioned disputes, or the novelist may have been moved by honest indignation at the mingled avarice and greediness of a nature the most opposite to his own ; but whatever may have been the motive, he both lashes him for his contempt of the sufferings of the poor, and plainly intimates that his wealth had been amassed by robbery and fraud. The imputations of Pope and Fielding were well deserved. Mr. Bowles relates that one of Walter's creatures, having helped him to a bargain, demanded compensation. Peter refused to grant it at his own expense, but undertook to reward him at the expense of someone else. In the ostensible capacity of an impartial adviser, he persuaded a neighbouring baronet to lease an estate to this tool upon terms which were flagrantly advantageous, and to charge, in addition, the rates and taxes upon an adjoining farm. The son of Peter's bailiff remembered, when a boy, to have gone with his father to the house of the miser, whom they found sitting in the dark. He lighted a candle with a dry raspberry stick applied to the fire ; but, on learning that the business did not require eyesight, he immediately put out the candle, and continued the conversation. Fielding was too well acquainted with Peter Walter to make it possible that his counterpart Peter Pounce should be the creation of fancy, and we cannot err in accepting the general belief of their identity.

In one of the *Spectators*, which is supposed to be written from the house of Sir Roger de Coverley, Addison says, that whereas in town, whilst following one character, it is ten to one but he is crossed in his way by another, and puts up such a variety of odd creatures that they foil the scent of each other, and puzzle the chase, in the country, he is forced to use a great deal of diligence before he can spring anything to his mind.¹ It is to be noted

¹ [*The Spectator*, No. 131.]

that it was exactly the reverse with Fielding. From his earliest manhood he had dwelt in cities, and had passed twelve years at least in London alone. Yet it was not there that he found the game he most delighted to pursue, but in the country, where his residence had been brief, and where, to the dissimilar discrimination of Addison, nearly all appeared barren. So entirely does the richness or poverty of the territory depend upon the genius of the observer—so surely, wherever there are human beings, there is likewise a world of interesting characters with which to people the realms of fiction. What an eagle glance must this great novelist have cast around him during the brief term of his rural rappings; how rapidly must his eye have taken measure of the people about him; how nicely he must have marked their peculiarities; what a perception he must have had for their humour; how firmly must the whole have become fixed in his mind! The squires with whom he hunted and feasted, the landlords with whom he chatted and tippled, had good reason to shake their heads at his madness while they laughed at his jests; but, as they marked his reckless bearing and jovial countenance, they could little have dreamt that they were laying themselves open to the most sagacious scrutiniser of human foibles in the world.

Richardson was angry to the end of his life at the share which he had been made to contribute to the entertainment of the readers of Fielding. The author of *Pamela* was insatiate of praise, and could bear no brother near the throne; he had now met with a satirizer and a superior in the same person, and hated him with the double aversion due to this twofold offence. Henceforward the female sycophants who surrounded him found that adulation of himself was not a surer passport to his favour than abuse of Fielding. Mrs. Barbauld says that the two novelists had been upon friendly terms before the publication of *Joseph Andrews*; and it must be confessed that this circumstance justified the indignant com-

plaint of Richardson, "that hints and names had been taken from his story with a lewd and ungenerous engraftment." But, instead of confining himself to the just charge of unhandsome treatment, he asserted that Fielding was a contemptible scribbler, a vicious moralist, and a vulgar man. He believed, or pretended to believe, that posterity would never applaud the writer who had presumed to turn Pamela into ridicule. He protested that, if he had not known who Fielding was, he should have inferred from his works that he was an ostler, and that, for a person of that description, or for a runner at a sponging-house, he might have been thought a genius who would have drawn forth the wish that he had had a liberal education, and the advantage of being admitted into respectable society. This, the well-bred Richardson had the good taste to write to the novelist's sister, who, though she had not quarrelled with her brother, was forced by her necessities to be civil to the patronising bookseller. Another of his remarks was, that the virtues of Fielding's heroes were the vices of a truly good man, and the censure was repeated with approbation by Dr. Johnson.¹ Richardson's appeal to the avenger Time has been heard and dismissed. Could he revisit the earth, he would find his hated rival enthroned high above him, and no flattering Eves would gather round his tea-table to soothe his wounded vanity, or send long epistles of fulsome adulation to gladden his breakfast. Yet he, too, was a genius, though of an inferior order; but few now wipe away the dust which has gathered upon his voluminous stories, or else, repelled by the tedious trivialities and mawkish prosings which overlay his beauties, they prematurely close the book.

Fielding had no worse motive in parodying Pamela — than to produce a work which would sell; but there was another writer whom he ridiculed in Joseph Andrews out of genuine resentment. In the preface to his first

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 190.]

comedy, he acknowledged his obligations to Colley Cibber.¹ Between a needy dramatist and that pompous theatrical manager there were likely to be abundant causes of dissension, and Fielding laughed at the odes of the Laureate, in *Pasquin*;² and in the *Historical Register* at his alterations of Shakespeare.³ Colley Cibber, in his egotistical but extremely clever and amusing *Apology for his Life*, which was published in November, 1739, retorted upon Fielding, and, amongst other abuse, called him "a broken wit."⁴ Fielding retaliated in the *Champion*, with a mock indictment of the apologist for the murder of the English language. He took the opportunity in *Joseph Andrews* to hang him upon a higher gibbet. He opened the work with an attack on him;⁵ and afterwards, to do justice to two offenders at one stroke, headed the chapter in which he disposed of Peter Walter—"A curious Dialogue which passed between Mr. Abraham Adams and Mr. Peter Pounce, better worth reading than all the works of Colley Cibber and many others."⁶ No description of satire could have been more galling to the self-important Cibber, whose "Apology" might more appropriately have been termed a "Eulogy," than this contemptuous pleasantry. It is needless to add that the moral Richardson and the dissolute Cibber became lasting friends.

A genius who has been long struggling in vain to show the world his quality must always feel elated when at last his efforts are crowned with success. Fielding had the greater reason to exult, since fame promised to be the harbinger of substantial comforts. Yet it chanced that the credit he derived from *Joseph Andrews* ushered in the most troubled period of his life. Incapacitated from much exertion by his old enemy, the gout, his wants in the winter of 1742 appear to have grown extreme. Bowed

¹ [*Love in Several Masques*, *Works*, vol. i. p. 89.]

² [*Works*, vol. iii. p. 308.]

³ [Vol. iii. p. 352.]

⁴ [Cibber's *Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber*, 4th ed., vol. i. p. 206.]

⁵ [*Joseph Andrews*, book i. chap. i.]

⁶ [*Ibid.*, book iii. chap. xiii.]

down by ill health and penury, he had to endure the far more poignant distress "of seeing," to use his own language, "a favourite child dying in one bed, and his wife in a condition very little better on another."¹ A hero for himself, he bore sickness and poverty with the utmost equanimity, but if either touched his family he was distracted with grief. A braver heart and a tenderer never beat. His child expired; and in a tract which he wrote subsequently, on the "Remedy of Affliction for the loss of our Friends," he reveals two touching traits of maternal affection which broke forth, one at her birth and the other at her death. "I remember the most excellent of women and tenderest of mothers, when, after a painful and dangerous delivery, she was told she had a daughter, answering, 'Good God! have I produced a creature who is to undergo what I have suffered!' Some years afterwards I heard the same woman, on the death of that very child, then one of the loveliest creatures ever seen, comforting herself with reflecting that her child could never know what it was to feel such a loss as she then lamented."² How vehement was Fielding's own attachment to his daughter may readily be inferred from the passage in the *Journey from this World to the Next*, in which he narrates his meeting with her as soon as he enters the Elysian gates. "What words can describe the raptures, the melting passionate tenderness with which we kissed each other, continuing in our embrace, with the most ecstatic joy, a space which, if time had been measured here as on earth, could not be less than half a year."³ In his essay on the *Remedy for Affliction*, he spoke of this prospect of union in everlasting bliss, as "the sweetest, most endearing, and ravishing" which could enter the mind. "What!" he exclaimed, "are all the trash and trifles, the bubbles, baubles, and gewgaws of this life, to such a meeting! This is a hope

¹ [Preface to *Miscellanies*.]

² [*Works*, vol. viii. p. 44.]

³ [Chap. viii., *Works*, vol. iv. p. 359.]

which no reasoning shall ever argue me out of, nor millions of such worlds as this should purchase."¹

His wife soon followed her daughter to the grave. Lady Mary Wortley states that he loved her passionately, and "her death," says Murphy, "brought on such a vehemence of grief, that his friends began to think him in danger of losing his reason."² She was the standing model from which he drew his most attractive female characters—the Mrs. Wilson of Joseph Andrews, the Sophia of Tom Jones, and, above all, Amelia. Even the glowing language he employed did not, according to Lady Mary, do more than justice to her amiable qualities and beauty. If, as the same authority asserts,³ he painted an accurate picture of himself in Mr. Booth, he must often have tried sorely the patience of his angel. But as his irregularities never produced in him indifference, as he always brought back with him from his tavern-revels his affection and allegiance, she never denied him that place in her heart which she possessed in his. The truth is, that his fondness for his wife and his addiction to conviviality were both intense, and each was probably in the ascendant, according as he chanced to be at home or abroad. It might, had he once sat down to it, have been as impossible to entice him from that celebrated little supper of hashed mutton which his truant ways compelled his Amelia to eat in mournful solitude, as it was difficult for him, when away, to resist the solicitations of Captain Trent and his companions to pass the evening at the King's Arms.

Mrs. Fielding had a maid who was almost broken-hearted at the loss of her mistress. The distracted husband found his best relief in mingling his tears with those of this sympathising servant. The bond of union grew stronger by the constant intercommunication of kindred feelings, and Fielding was induced, through the admiration she entertained for his first wife, to make her his

¹ [Vol. viii. p. 45.]

² [Murphy, vol. i. p. 63.]

³ [Lady M. W. Montagu, *Works*, vol. iv. p. 259.]

second. She was not handsome; and her only attraction must have been her devotion to himself and his family. Her future conduct, it is said, justified his good opinion; and indeed he has commemorated her, in his *Voyage to Lisbon*, as a woman who discharged all the "offices becoming the female character"—"a faithful friend, an amiable companion, and a tender nurse."¹ The novelist lived too disorderly and precarious a life to have his social position much affected by an unequal marriage. If he associated with ladies it must have been at other people's houses. The frequenters of his own lodgings were likely to be male friends and literary confederates who loved the man, and admired his genius, and who would care little whether his maid handed them their tea as a servant, or made it for them as a wife.

While the first Mrs. Fielding still survived, her husband, to relieve their necessities, took his early comedy of the *Wedding Day* from his desk with an intention to revise it. The danger of his wife interrupted the task which he found himself, through grief, quite incapable of continuing, and the piece was performed, in February, 1743, in its old imperfect condition. It had but a faint success, and he did not realise fifty pounds by the venture.² In the same year he brought out by subscription three volumes of *Miscellanies*. The members of his profession were conspicuous in their patronage of the work. Murphy says that the Bar were always his supporters, and that many lawyers who rose to the first eminence were among his particular intimates.³ In relating the celebrated reply of Mr. Justice Burnet to the man who complained that he should be hanged for such a trifle as stealing a horse—"You are not to be hanged for stealing a horse, but you are to be hanged that horses may not be stolen"—Fielding designates the judge as his "ever-honoured and beloved

¹ [*Works*, vol. x. p. 243.]

² [Preface to *Miscellanies*.]

³ [Murphy, vol. i. p. 45.]

friend.”¹ His manliness, his benevolence, his good humour, his literature, and his wit, endeared him to his associates in spite of vices which some among them must have reprobated, and in spite of improvidences which must have taxed their forbearance and generosity. Joseph Warton testifies to the fascination of his society. “I wish you had been with me last week,” he says in a letter to his brother in October, 1746, “when I spent two evenings with Fielding and his sister, who wrote David Simple, and you may guess I was very well entertained. The lady, indeed, retired pretty soon, but Russell and I sat up with the poet till one or two in the morning, and were inexpressibly diverted. I find he values, as he justly may, Joseph Andrews above all his writings.”² Tom Jones was yet to come. Not a single scene of this delightful drama of real life has been preserved. All has perished with the actors; and not one of his “inexpressibly diverting” flashes of merriment has made its way to us through the mists of time. When we reflect how much we have lost of wit, and wisdom, and learning, how much of the play of heart and intellect, we must acknowledge that the Boswells are almost as important as the Johnsons. There would, indeed, be little reason for regret if we were to receive Dr. Burney’s account of Fielding’s conversation as its invariable characteristic—that it was coarse, and so tinctured with the rank weeds of Covent Garden, that a few years later it would not have been tolerated in respectable society. But this was only one aspect of his mind, though an extremely disagreeable one.

Warton in his letter calls him “the poet”; but this was a title to which he could lay no claim. To swell his *Miscellanies* he inserted a number of verses, with the confession that it was a department of literature which he had very little cultivated, and to which he made slight pretensions. Many of the pieces were early love-ditties—

¹ [*Voyage to Lisbon*, Introduction; *Works*, vol. x. p. 199.]

² [Wooll’s *Biographical Memoirs of Warton*, p. 215.]

the productions, he said, of the heart rather than the head. One is not more perceptible in them than the other, for they are as tame in sentiment as they are clumsy in execution. He did not possess a single element of the poetic art. He has neither sweetness nor strength, neither harmony nor ideas. Swift at an earlier period had numbered him in the *Rhapsody on Poetry* (1733), among the most wretched scribblers of the age:—

For instance, when you rashly think
No rhymers can like Welsted sink,
His merits balanced, you shall find
That Fielding leaves him far behind.

“The Laureate” was afterwards put into the place of disgrace, and a note was attached to the Dublin edition of Swift’s works, stating that Fielding’s name had been maliciously inserted, and that “the supposed author of the *Rhapsody* manifested a great esteem for his ingenious writings.” This only shows that Swift had changed his opinion of him; but that opinion, when confined to his verses, was not unjust, and the Dean must have been endowed with more than mortal discernment to have detected the great novelist in the miserable poet.

The prose of the *Miscellanies*, though it cannot be ranked with the finest productions of the author, was not in general unworthy of him. There is an excellent *Essay on Conversation*, the greater part of which might more properly be called an essay on good manners, and which all the world might read with advantage. The object of it is to expose the common failings which men bring with them into company, and to show that the essence of sociality consists in the sinking every notion of self in the desire to please others. A second dissertation, on the *Knowledge of the Characters of Men*, professes to give rules, “the efficacy (I had almost said infallibility) of which I have myself experienced,” for distinguishing the real propensities of persons in spite of the specious

disguises they assume. The performance is below the promise. He might almost as well have boasted that he had discovered the philosopher's stone as that he had found out a substitute for Ithuriel's spear. His directions are not only inadequate to meet numberless cases, but they have the usual fault of such attempts, that they are drawn from a partial experience. He who finds himself mistaken in a man is commonly far too hasty to infer that his outward symbols and his ill disposition are invariably connected. It is obvious that if a few external indications were a certain guide to the thoughts of the heart, dissimulation would long ago have ceased to be a possible art. Every reader will probably be able to recall among his own acquaintances an exception to one or other of Fielding's tests; but the treatise is not without the marks of his sagacity, and contains useful advice.

It was in the *Miscellanies* that appeared the *Journey from this World to the Next*. Fielding could not, without the grossest profanity, have borrowed his notions from the Christian religion. He properly confines himself to the fables of heathenism, adjusted to modern usage and somewhat varied by his own invention. In the early, and incomparably the happiest, portion of the work, he makes the representation of what passes after death the vehicle to convey his notions of what passes upon earth. A few sentences culled from the chapter on "The Proceedings of Judge Minos at the Gate of Elysium," which is the best in the book, will give an idea both of the execution and the design.

I now got near enough to the gate to hear the several claims of those who endeavoured to pass. The first, among other pretensions, set forth that he had been very liberal to an hospital; but Minos answered, "Ostentation," and repulsed him. . . . The next spirit that came up declared that he had done neither good nor evil in the world; for that since his arrival at man's estate he had spent his whole time in search of curiosities, and particularly in the study of butterflies, of which he had collected an

immense number. Minos made him no answer, but with great scorn pushed him back. . . . He was succeeded by a spirit who told the judge he believed his works would speak for him. "What works?" answered Minos. "My dramatic works," replied the other, "which have done so much good in recommending virtue and punishing vice." "Very well," said the judge; "if you please to stand by, the first person who passes the gate by your means shall carry you in with him; but, if you will take my advice, I think, for expedition sake, you had better return, and live another life upon earth." The bard grumbled at this, and replied that, besides his poetical works, he had done some other good things; for that he had once lent the whole profits of a benefit-night to a friend, and by that means had saved him and his family from destruction. Upon this the gate flew open, and Minos desired him to walk in, telling him, if he had mentioned this at first, he might have spared the remembrance of his plays. The poet answered he believed if Minos had read his works, he would set a higher value on them. He was then beginning to repeat, but Minos pushed him forward, and, turning his back to him, applied himself to the next passenger. . . . With fear and trembling, he said he hoped Minos would consider that, though he had gone astray, he had suffered for it; that it was necessity which drove him to the robbery of eighteenpence which he had committed, and for which he was hanged; that he had done some good actions in his life; that he had supported an aged parent with his labour; that he had been a very tender husband and a kind father; and that he had ruined himself by giving bail for his friend. At which words the gate opened, and Minos bid him enter, giving him a slap on the back as he passed by him.¹

The humour and satire of these passages are both in the manner of Addison; but the portrait of the penitent purloiner of eighteenpence, who gets an approving slap upon the back for his benevolence, is characteristic of Fielding. In his own distresses he had witnessed much of the miseries of others, and knew that men with many excellent qualities were sometimes seduced by temptations into casual error. In the tenth chapter the author meets

¹ [Chap. vii.]

with Julian the Apostate, whom he supposes to have been condemned for his offences to live many successive lives upon earth in various capacities. From this point the work degenerates. Julian relates his adventures in his several characters; and the scheme promised a satire upon the tendencies of the different nations, callings, and ages of the world; but the narrative is flat and pointless,—a medley of anachronisms, in which there is neither wit nor keeping, and from which the author suddenly breaks off, out of an apparent consciousness that it was a failure. Fielding was only in his element when describing the events and personages of his own time. His good pictures are all drawn from the life.

The third volume of the *Miscellanies* is entirely occupied with Jonathan Wild. He disclaimed the idea of giving a faithful history of the life of this notorious villain. "Roguery," he said, "and not a rogue, is the subject."¹ Nor was it vulgar roguery alone at which he aimed, but at mean and unworthy actions in every station, however dignified by specious names. In other words, under a narrative of the adventures of common thieves, he meant to brand the general vices and follies of mankind. The notion was borrowed from the *Beggar's Opera*; but the manner is copied, though with no servile hand, from Swift's *Tale of a Tub*. Here is a specimen from the scene in Newgate, in which Roger Johnson, who levies taxes on the prisoners under the plea of assisting them in their defence, and who wears a silk nightgown, an embroidered waistcoat, and a velvet cap, as emblems of his supremacy, is opposed by Wild. These two men were intended to represent the leaders of the political factions of England. Roger Johnson is Sir Robert Walpole, who was compelled to resign at the beginning of 1742; and Lord Wilmington, who succeeded him, seems to be pictured in Wild. The *prigs* are the placemen, whether in or out; and the debtors are the people.

¹ [Preface to *Miscellanies*.]

Newgate was divided into parties on this occasion ; the *prigs* on each side representing their chief or great man to be the only person by whom the affairs of Newgate could be managed with safety and advantage. The *prigs* had, indeed, very incompatible interests ; for, whereas the supporters of Johnson, who was in possession of the plunder of Newgate, were admitted to some share under their leader, so the abettors of Wild had, on his promotion, the same views of dividing some part of the spoil among themselves. It is no wonder, therefore, they were both so warm on each side. What may seem more remarkable was, that the debtors, who were entirely unconcerned in the dispute, and who were the destined plunder of both parties, should interest themselves with the utmost violence, some on behalf of Wild, and others in favour of Johnson. So that all Newgate resounded with "Wild for ever" ; "Johnson for ever." And the poor debtors re-echoed "the liberties of Newgate," which, in the cant language, signifies *plunder*, as loudly as the thieves themselves. In short, such quarrels and animosities happened between them that they seemed rather the people of two countries long at war with each other than the inhabitants of the same castle. Wild's party at length prevailed, and he succeeded to the place and power of Johnson, whom he presently stripped of all his finery ; but, when it was proposed that he should sell it and divide the money for the good of the whole, he waived that motion, saying it was not yet time, that he should find a better opportunity, that the clothes wanted cleaning, with many other pretences, and within two days, to the surprise of many, he appeared in them himself ; for which he vouchsafed no other apology than that they fitted him much better than they did Johnson, and that they became him in a much more elegant manner. This behaviour of Wild greatly incensed the debtors, particularly those by whose means he had been promoted. They grumbled extremely, and vented great indignation against Wild, who continued to levy contributions among the prisoners, to apply the garnish to his own use, and to strut openly in the ornaments which he had stripped from Johnson. To speak sincerely, there was more bravado than real use or advantage in these trappings. As for the nightgown, its outside, indeed, made a glittering tinsel appearance, but it kept him not warm, nor could the finery of it do him much honour, since every one knew it did not properly belong to him. As to the waistcoat, it fitted

him very ill, being infinitely too big for him; and the cap was so heavy that it made his head ache.¹

The incompetence of Lord Wilmington for his situation, which is thus happily expressed in the concluding sentence, is notorious to every reader of history, and not less so that the pretended patriots who turned out Sir Robert Walpole broke their promises, and disgusted their supporters. This admirable satire, however, is for all ages; and the Newgate scene had been enacted many times before, and has been repeated many times since. But with numerous excellent passages, *Jonathan Wild*, on the whole, is clumsy in the conception, and coarse in the details. Part is literal, part metaphorical; some of the incidents are solely applicable to felons, and some have no significance except in their secondary sense. This confusion of plan has involved the narrative in such perplexity that Sir Walter Scott has declared his inability to divine its drift.² To preserve the consistency of a long allegorical satire requires more thought and care than Fielding could bestow. What is admirable was due to his genius; what is defective to his haste, with the exception of sundry repulsive particulars, which were due, we fear, to an inherent grossness of taste.

The loss of his wife rendered Fielding incapable for a time of intellectual exertion. His first re-appearance as an author was in a preface to the second edition of the clever tale of *David Simple*, by his sister Sarah. He denies the report that he was the writer of the work, protests that he has ceased to seek or desire literary fame, and wishes it to be understood that he has applied to his profession with such perfect diligence that he has no leisure for composition.³ Either the announcement failed to bring briefs, or, as Murphy intimates, he was prevented from holding them by recurring fits of gout.⁴ He shortly

¹ [*Jonathan Wild*, book iv. chap. iii.]

² [Scott's *Miscellaneous Prose Works*, vol. i. p. 258.]

³ [*Works*, vol. v. p. 413.] ⁴ [Murphy, vol. i. p. 64.]

afterwards abandoned the idea of retaining even a subordinate position at the Bar, and in November, 1745, started a weekly periodical called the *True Patriot*. It was the business, he said, of every man, and especially of an author, "to accommodate himself to the fashion of the times"; that, by neglecting this golden rule, Milton remained long in obscurity, and the world had nearly lost the best poem it has ever seen, while, by adhering to it, Tom Durfey and many others gained both money and credit. His publisher informed him that nothing was read except newspapers, and as the existing productions of the kind were the work of booksellers' journeymen, and every way contemptible, he hoped that a true patriot of no party, a gentleman and a scholar, would meet with support. Authorship in that age was often regarded more as a degradation than a distinction; and Fielding, who must frequently have suffered from the scorn of moneyed and titled ignorance, flings back the contempt, in his opening number, with unanswerable sarcasm, when, speaking of persons being weak enough to be ashamed of writing, he adds,—"that is, of having more sense than their neighbours, or of communicating it to them."

What Murphy republished of the *True Patriot* consists of brief essays on the topics of the day. The rebellion of 1745 was in progress, and Fielding, a stout Hanoverian, endeavoured to infuse into the languid public a spirit of active resistance to the Pretender. The author drew terrifying descriptions of the bloodshed, confiscations, and tyranny which would ensue from the success of the rising, and while the alarm lasted the paper sold. The extinction of the rebellion put an end to the *True Patriot*, and at the close of 1747 he entered the field with a new periodical, the *Jacobite's Journal*, which was intended to complete the discomfiture of the vanquished faction and rally his countrymen round the throne. But this, like its predecessor, had a brief existence. He was not adapted for periodical labour. The spirit of his essays was not sustained, and betray the

old procrastination and its attendant haste which beset him in the days when he wrote for the stage.

Every scheme failing, and poverty still pursuing him, he was fain to accept, in December, 1748, what was then considered the degrading office of a Bow Street magistrate. This functionary was paid by fees, and was called "a *trading* justice." The enemies of Fielding accused him of the customary venality, but he himself has left a solemn declaration that by composing, instead of inflaming, the quarrels of porters and beggars, and by refusing to take a shilling from a man who would not have had another left, he had reduced "five hundred pounds a year of the dirtiest money upon earth to little more than three hundred," and of this a considerable portion was the perquisite of his clerk.¹ He had, however, in addition to his magisterial emoluments, a pension from the Government. An anecdote, related by Horace Walpole in a letter of May 18th, 1749, gives us a glimpse of him in his new quarters: "Rigby and Peter Bathurst, t'other night, carried a servant of the latter, who had attempted to shoot him, before Fielding, who to all his other vocations has, by the grace of Mr. Lyttelton, added that of Middlesex Justice. He sent them word he was at supper: they must come next morning. They did not understand that freedom, and ran up, where they found him banqueting with a blind man, a woman of the town, and three Irishmen, on some cold mutton and a bone of ham, both in one dish, and the dirtiest cloth. He never stirred, nor asked them to sit. Rigby, who had seen him so often come to beg a guinea of Sir C. Williams, and Bathurst, at whose father's he had lived for victuals, understood that dignity as little, and pulled themselves chairs; on which he civilized."²

Walpole habitually coloured his stories, believing, like many who are ambitious of wit, that point is a quality

¹ [*Voyage to Lisbon*, Introduction, *Works*, vol. x. p. 197.]

² [Walpole's *Letters*, ed. Cunningham, vol. ii. p. 162.]

more important than truth. In the present instance the distortions may be due to the ignorance of his informants. Mrs. Fielding, who, as she was not born a lady, had probably not the appearance of one, was, we may be confident, the equivocal-looking female, when we consider that the scene of the supper was at her own house. The blind man, as Sir Walter Scott has suggested, was her husband's half-brother,¹ who assisted him in his office, and finally succeeded him. The Irishmen, it is likely, were needy brethren of the quill, who had claims on the novelist's gratitude and compassion. In these comparatively prosperous days, when he had an income of four or five hundred a year, "he knew," says Murphy, "no use of money, but to keep his table open to those who had been his friends when young, and had impaired their own fortunes."² His want of courtesy to Rigby and Bathurst, Mr. Lawrence³ justly imputes to resentment at their impertinence in forcing their way into his private apartment. The sluttishness of his supper-table may be true enough. His precarious mode of existence had not been favourable to the elegancies of life, and the habits learnt in prolonged poverty may have been retained when he had newly arrived at a competence. The borrowing of guineas may be considered as confirmed by Murphy, who admits that in his necessities he would sometimes depart from delicacy; but in all these cases, adds the biographer, his friends were aware how his own feelings reprimanded him. No one can censure harshly a man who battled so bravely with difficulties, who underwent such toil, and who, in the midst of penury, produced such wonderful works; but neither is it possible to restrain a wish that he had drunk a few bottles less of claret, maintained his independence, and not been compelled to hold out his hat to acquaintances, who remembered

¹ [Scott's *Miscellaneous Prose Works*, vol. i. p. 258.]

² [Murphy, vol. i. p. 83.]

³ [*Life of Henry Fielding*, 1855.]

the beggar and forgot the genius. "Men," he said, and he was an example of its truth, "do not become rich by what they get, but by what they keep."¹ Not only did his indulgences empty his pocket, they prevented him from refilling it. They broke in upon his industry, threw discredit upon his character, and deprived him of promotion and employment. Generosity itself loses much of its virtue when he who gives one day is reduced to borrow the next. It is related of him that, being pressed by the tax-gatherer, he prevailed on his bookseller to advance the amount. Returning, he met an old college intimate, whose needs were urgent, and bestowed every sixpence on him. When he reached home, he was told that the collector had been twice in his absence. "Friendship," said he, "has called for the money and had it; let the collector call again."² These are the traits of a noble heart; but it would have been nobler still if he had not too often begged with one hand what he scattered with the other.

➤ In the same letter in which Horace Walpole relates the visit of Rigby and Bathurst to Fielding, he mentions that Millar, the bookseller, in consequence of the enormous sale of *Tom Jones*, had generously given the author £100 in addition to the £600 agreed on. This famous novel was published in February, 1749, and on the 28th of the month a notice appeared in the *General Advertiser* that, it being impossible to bind sets fast enough to answer the demand, those who pleased might have them in blue paper or boards. It is a mistake to suppose that there is anything peculiar in the eagerness with which particular works have been received in the present day. Our forefathers, by comparison a small population and upon the whole less educated, supplied fewer readers; but those who did read had tastes and faculties as keen as our own, and works as worthy to rouse their admiration. The

¹ [*Voyage to Lisbon, Works*, vol. x. p. 295.]

² [*Gentleman's Magazine*, August, 1786.]

copies sold were not so numerous, but the excitement within the circle of buyers was full as intense. Lady Bradshaigh, who corresponded with Richardson under the assumed name of Mrs. Belfour, tells him, in October, that the young ladies were charmed with Fielding's hero; that she had been in company with several, each of whom called her lover Tom Jones; that she had a letter from one lamenting the loss of her Tom, and from another rejoicing at her happiness in his company. In like manner the gentlemen had their Sophias, and a friend, who insisted upon showing his, produced a mastiff puppy. It would appear, however, from the same authority, that Sophia was thought a trifling and insipid character. There can be no stronger evidence of the extreme popularity of the book than this immediate conversion of its names into household words.

The favour with which Tom Jones was received by the ladies would seem to bear out the assertion of Fielding that he had introduced nothing "which could offend even the chastest eye."¹ This sounds wonderful in our generation, and we should suspect that the habits he had contracted and the company he had kept must have blunted his perceptions, if there was not the strongest evidence of the extent to which the good people of that time were wont to carry their toleration. Proofs might be adduced by the hundred of the fact; but there is none so striking and so lively as that which is given in a letter of Walter Scott: "A grand-aunt of my own, Mrs. Keith of Ravelstone . . . lived with unabated vigour of intellect to a very advanced age. . . . One day she asked me, when we happened to be alone together, whether I had ever seen Mrs. Behn's novels? I confessed the charge. Whether I could get her a sight of them? I said, with some hesitation, I believed I could; but that I did not think she would like either the manners, or the language, which approached too near that of Charles II.'s time to

¹ [*Tom Jones*, Dedication.]

be quite proper reading. 'Nevertheless,' said the good old lady, 'I remember them being so much admired, and being so much interested in them myself, that I wish to look at them again.' To hear was to obey. So I sent Mrs. Aphra Behn, curiously sealed up, with 'private and confidential' on the packet, to my gay old grand-aunt. The next time I saw her afterwards, she gave me back Aphra, properly wrapped up, with nearly these words: 'Take back your bonny Mrs. Behn; and, if you will take my advice, put her in the fire, for I found it impossible to get through the very first novel. But is it not,' she said, 'a very odd thing that I, an old woman of eighty and upwards, sitting alone, feel myself ashamed to read a book which, sixty years ago, I have heard read aloud for the amusement of large circles, consisting of the first and most creditable society in London?'"¹

Hannah More, to be sure, relates that the only occasion on which Johnson was angry with her was when she alluded to a passage in *Tom Jones*. He told her he scarcely knew a more corrupt work, that he was shocked to hear her quote it, and was sorry she had read it.² But this was at a later period, and refers more to the moral than to the language and incidents of the book. Johnson, too, was blindly prejudiced against Fielding, to a degree which would almost lead to the suspicion that he had a personal animosity to him. In common with nearly everybody, he vehemently commended the virtuous tendency of *Pamela* and *Clarissa*, which, if they are less coarse than *Tom Jones*, are also much less decorous. Indeed there can be no more conclusive demonstration of the latitude allowed by the age, than that these famous productions should not merely have been suffered for the entertainment they afforded, which would have been nothing surprising, but that they should have been considered a sort of *Whole Duty of Woman*—a glass

¹ [Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, ed. 1848, vol. vi. p. 406.]

² [*Memoirs of Hannah More*, 3rd ed., vol. i. p. 168.]

in which young ladies might learn to dress their minds with the greatest advantage.

Amid the general applause of Tom Jones, malice, envy, and hatred, in the person of Richardson, affected to regard it with scorn and disgust. He professed himself unable to read it through, and could not conceal his mortification when Lady Bradshaigh commended it, and advised him to resume it. With that modesty which distinguished him, he wrote in January, 1751, to M. Defreval, a Frenchman, that he had "the pleasure of telling him, *without any mixture of vanity*, that Clarissa continued rising in reputation"; and he had the pleasure of adding in the same letter,—“The run of Tom Jones is over, even with us.” No one, in fact, who valued his favour, would have presumed to mention the book in his presence, except for the purpose of abusing it.

Fielding has stated that his great work was the labour of some years¹ of his life.¹ It bears the internal evidence of long meditation. Genius might have thrown off the characters in haste; but it was beyond human capacity to have extemporised a plot which stands alone in the world for the enormous number of incidents which are brought into it, and all of which are pertinent to the story. No one who does not read it with this view can conceive the art with which it is put together. It is an elaborate and complex mosaic, in which an infinity of pieces, curiously dovetailed, result in a perfect pattern, and in which nothing could be taken away or displaced without injury to the whole. Workmanship like this requires time as well as skill, and that Fielding should have expended upon it such excessive pains is one of the most curious and instructive facts in his life. There was an interval of seven years between the publication of Joseph Andrews and the publication of Tom Jones. In that dreary interval poverty had seldom left his door. He had the strongest temptation to follow up his success, and put forth novel

¹ [Dedication.]

after novel, as a little while before he had crowded play upon play. But he knew he was a genius; he had discovered the direction in which that genius lay; and, stronger than the pinchings of want and the cravings of pleasure, was the love of glory, and the desire to build up a monument which should be worthy of his powers. Whatever was the pressure, he met it with the hasty effusion of the minute, and would not send his incomparable design rough-hewn into the world. He kept it by him till it had received the nicest touches of the chisel, and it was published at last when he was easy in his circumstances. Such instances of patient self-denial are rare in literary history, and it is what we should least of all have expected in the careless, festive, spendthrift, and impoverished Fielding. How distinct was the intention with which he worked, and how strong the expectation of the result, appears from his invocation to Fame in the introduction to one of the books into which the novel was divided:—

Fill my ravished fancy with the hopes of charming ages yet to come. . . . Do thou teach me not only to foresee, but to enjoy, nay, even to feed on, future praise. Comfort me by a solemn assurance that, when the little parlour in which I sit at this instant shall be reduced to a worse furnished box, I shall be read with honour by those who never knew nor saw me, and whom I shall neither know nor see.

Nay, in the invocation to Wealth, which follows, he seems to anticipate that the reputation of his work will be the best legacy he can leave to his children:—

Come thou, and if I am too tasteless of thy valuable treasures, warm my heart with the transporting thought of conveying them to others. Tell me, that through thy bounty, the prattling babes, whose innocent play hath often been interrupted by my labours, may one time be amply rewarded for them.¹

He worked, in short, in the same spirit which actuated Sir Christopher Wren, when he said that “he built for eternity.”

¹ [*Tom Jones*, book xiii. chap. i.]

Tom Jones was dedicated to Mr., afterwards Lord, Lyttelton, who was a schoolfellow of the author, and remained through life his steady friend. Fielding says that it was he who suggested the book, but this, however true, was a hollow compliment. A distressed writer who had produced one successful work needed neither a ghost nor Mr. Lyttelton to advise him to attempt another. But his patron, in conjunction with the Duke of Bedford, had done him the more essential service of supplying him with funds. To Lyttelton, he confesses, he partly owed his "existence during great part of the time" he was "employed in composing" it, and he speaks of the "princely benefactions" of the Duke, to whom Lyttelton had recommended him.¹ There was a third person who had largely assisted him—the "humble Allen" of Pope.² From him and Lyttelton he states that he had copied the portrait of Allworthy, whose name was meant for an epitome of the characters of these benevolent friends.³ Many of the allusions to Allen are palpable, as when he says, that "though Allworthy had missed the advantage of a learned education, he had so well profited by a vigorous though late application to letters, and by much conversation with men of eminence, that he was himself a very competent judge in most kinds of literature."⁴ This was nothing more than the truth; but when Warburton once, at Allen's table, broke out into a panegyric upon some observation of their host, and remarked that, in spite of this want of a "learned education," he expressed himself better than any of them, Fielding whispered to his neighbour, Dr. Harington, then a mere youth, "Harkee to that sycophantic dog!" In his distribution, however, of compliments, he did not forget the husband of his benefactor's niece, and begs of Learning to "give him a while that

¹ [Dedication.]

² [Pope's *Epilogue to the Satires*, Dial. i. v. 136.]

³ [*Tom Jones*, book xiii. chap. i.]

⁴ [*Ibid.*, book i. chap. x.]

key to all his treasures, which she had entrusted to his Warburton."¹

Fielding had secured his fame. In his next novel he may have thought again of profit. Notwithstanding his ill health, and his magisterial duties, *Amelia* was completed on December 2, 1751, less than three years after the publication of *Tom Jones*. Millar, as Sir Nathaniel Wraxall was informed by Alderman Cadell, his successor, bought the copyright for £800. He got Sir Andrew Mitchell to read the manuscript, who reported it to be good, but inferior to its predecessor. Millar, fearing he might be a loser, told the trade at his next sale that most of the copies were bespoke, and all were eager in consequence to put down their names. Sir Walter Scott gives a similar account, with merely the variation that the copyright cost £1,000, and that Millar's announcement to his brother booksellers was that the expected competition for the work prevented him from allowing them the usual discount.² The fame of *Tom Jones* would be enough of itself to account for the demand. For once Fielding succeeded in relaxing the frown on Dr. Johnson's brow. He read the book through without stopping,³ and pronounced *Amelia* the most pleasing heroine in romance.⁴ Mr. Thackeray confirms the verdict, and calls her "the most charming character in English fiction."⁵ The fastidious Richardson thought both *Amelia* and her husband "wretchedly low and dirty," and, not caring what became of them, could not advance beyond the first volume.⁶ To him the most pleasing heroine in romance was *Clarissa*. The public itself was disappointed. "That vile broken nose, never cured, ruined," said Dr. Johnson, "the sale of perhaps the only book, which being published betimes

¹ [*Tom Jones*, book xiii. chap. i.]

² [Scott's *Miscellaneous Prose Works*, vol. i. p. 261.]

³ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 508.]

⁴ [Mrs. Piozzi's *Anecdotes*, p. 221.]

⁵ [Thackeray's *English Humourists*, 1853, p. 263.]

⁶ [Chalmers' note to *Murphy*, vol. i. p. 77.]

one morning, a new edition was called for before night.”¹ Fielding fastened this blemish upon his heroine because his wife had met with a similar accident before they married, and his new novel was intended for an offering to her memory. There is a stage in grief when most men find a melancholy pleasure in speaking of the virtues of those they have lost, and we are not surprised to find him expressing a wish in *Tom Jones*, that “the tender maid whose grandmother was yet unborn, might send forth from her heaving breast the sympathetic sigh, when she read, under the fictitious name of Sophia, the real worth which once existed in his Charlotte”;² but it is one of the mysteries of the mind that he could bring his memory to recall, and his hand to trace the succession of sorrows his vices had inflicted on her—the long train of domestic trials to which she was subjected through his dissolute habits. He doubtless desired to show how she shone under her multiplied distresses, but it is a wonder that his heart did not burst in the effort. There was little or no exaggeration in the story. Richardson says that Fielding’s description of brawls, prisons, and sponging-houses were drawn from personal experience, and we learn through a less hostile witness—Lady Mary Wortley—that the vicissitudes of his married time included all the evils of the scholar’s life,—

Toil, envy, want, the *garret*, and the *gaol*,—

and that the health of his wife was undermined by their harassing existence.³

In January, 1752, Fielding commenced another periodical paper—the *Covent Garden Journal*—which was published twice a week, and lasted just a twelvemonth. He began by declaring war against the swarm of needy writers with whom he had long been a favourite topic of abuse.⁴

¹ [Mrs. Piozzi’s *Anecdotes*, p. 221.]

² [*Tom Jones*, book xiii. chap. i.]

³ [Lady M. W. Montagu’s *Works*, vol. iv. pp. 259–60.]

⁴ [*Covent Garden Journal*, No. 3.]

They were not backward to return the blow, and he was soon involved in an exchange of bad jokes and scurrilous language with Sir John Hill. In many parts of his writings Fielding speaks of envy as the most pernicious and pervading of passions. He seems to have suffered largely from it, and the provocation he had received may have incited him to take revenge. Retaliation, seldom politic, is humiliating unless its success is signal. Gulliver is an object of dignity while he disdains the peltings of a mob of Lilliputians, but if he turns to attack them, and is thrown himself into the mire, he is disgraced by the attempt. This was pretty much the fate of Fielding in his contest with Hill. The author of the "Adventures of George Edwards, a Creole," proved himself a keener controversialist than the author of *Tom Jones*.¹ Some of the future papers in the *Covent Garden Journal* are interesting for their allusions to the usages of the time, and because they contain the opinions of Fielding, but few are marked by talent and not one by genius. He was a second-rate essayist at the best.

The law all this time engaged a considerable share of his attention. He was elected by the magistrates, in May, 1749, chairman of the Middlesex Sessions. He published shortly afterwards a charge to the Grand Jury, and shows himself extremely zealous against practices in some of which he had greatly indulged, and was himself an example of their ill effects.² In 1751 he put forth an essay on the "Causes of the late Increase of Robberies, with Proposals for Remedying the Evil"; in 1752, a warning admonition, entitled, "Examples of the Interposition of Providence in the Detection of Murder"; in 1753, a "Proposal for making an effectual Provision for the Poor," in which he partly anticipates the present system; and, in the same year, a pamphlet on the case of the notorious Elizabeth Canning, whose cause he

¹ [D'Israeli's *Quarrels of Authors*, vol. ii. p. 99.]

² [*Works*, vol. x. p. 153, etc.]

espoused. But the inevitable hour was now at hand when legal and literary exertions were alike to cease. His latest services in his official capacity are recorded in his own affecting narrative.¹ His shattered constitution continued daily to decline, and he was about to proceed to Bath in August, 1753, when he was desired by the Duke of Newcastle to suggest a plan for putting an end to the depredations committed nightly in the streets. With a few hundred pounds he bribed informers, and dispersed the gangs. While thus employed, his disorders increased upon him, and three diseases—jaundice, dropsy, and asthma—were contending for possession of a body already wasted to a shadow. He held on notwithstanding, till success crowned his efforts, for he had nothing to leave his family, and hoped to establish a claim on the Government which might secure them a moderate provision at his death.

Deriving no permanent benefit from medicines, he was — advised to try a warmer climate, and fixed upon Lisbon. The last lines of his narrative of the voyage to that place, — from which he was never to return, were traced within two months of his lingering death, and nowhere shall we find so lively and authentic a portrait of the man. “He was — then,” says Southey, in a letter to Caroline Bowles, “dying by inches, and survived his voyage only a very few weeks, for which reason his account of it is to me the most extraordinary, and perhaps the most interesting, of all his works. Never did any man’s natural hilarity support itself so marvellously under complicated diseases, and every imaginable kind of discomfort.” And, in another letter, Southey speaks of him as presenting, on this occasion, “the most remarkable example he had ever met with of native cheerfulness triumphant over bodily suffering.”² Disease, which subdued his qualities, could not — destroy them. As his worn-out body was still the image

¹ [*Voyage to Lisbon, Works*, vol. x. p. 200.]

² *Correspondence of Robert Southey with Caroline Bowles*, pp. 184, 198.

of his former self, so his mind exhibited in fainter pulses its old propensities. His wife, when on board the vessel which conveyed them, endured agonies from toothache. She fell asleep, and the pause in her sufferings raised his spirits. "But, unfortunately for me," he says, "I was left in a disposition of enjoying an agreeable hour without the assistance of a companion, which has always appeared to me necessary to such enjoyment."¹ There spoke the passion which had carried him times out of number to coffee-houses and taverns. Solitary, meditative happiness was unknown to him. It must come reflected back from the human countenance. Imprisoned at sea with persons, of whom part were sick and the remainder deaf or stupid, he had no resource except in his pen, and he unwillingly took it up to escape the more intolerable evil of total stagnation. He wrote:—

This circumstance of being shut up within the circumference of a few yards, with a score of human creatures, with not one of whom it was possible to converse, was perhaps so rare as scarce ever to have happened before, nor could it ever happen to one who disliked it more than myself, or to myself at a season when I wanted more food for my social disposition, or could converse less wholesomely and happily with my own thoughts. To this accident, which fortune opened to me in the Downs, was owing the first serious thought which I ever entertained of enrolling myself among the voyage-writers.²

No longer desirous to write for fame, or reduced to write for bread, he was still compelled to write for want of company. The Journal commences, June 26th, 1754:—

On this day, the most melancholy sun I had ever beheld arose, and found me awake at my house at Fordhook. By the light of this sun I was, in my own opinion, last to behold and take leave of some of those creatures on whom I doted with a mother-like fondness, guided by nature and passion, and uncured and unhardened by all the doctrines of that philosophical school where I had learned to bear pains and to despise death. In this

¹ [*Works*, vol. x. p. 230.]

² [*Ibid.*, p. 304.]

situation, as I could not conquer nature, I submitted entirely to her, and she made as great a fool of me as she had ever done of any woman whatsoever; under pretence of giving me leave to enjoy, she drew me in to suffer, the company of my little ones during eight hours; and I doubt whether, in that time, I did not undergo more than in all my distemper.¹

There again, in this pathetic passage, spoke another undying passion of the tender heart of Henry Fielding.

His dropsy had made such progress that he repeatedly required to be tapped; his countenance was so ghastly that pregnant women avoided the sight of him; he was so lame and weak as to be unable to walk, he had even to be drawn up from the cabin to the deck; and when he was carried, on embarking, to the ship, the sailors and watermen assailed him with inhuman jests on his appearance. A storm arose at sea which "would have given no small alarm to a man who had either not learned what it is to die, or known what it is to be miserable."² Fielding was not only calm for himself; he reflected with complacency that the wife and daughter whom he must shortly leave without a protector would be placed beyond the need of one; yet he who penned these touching sentiments, who suffered so much in body from disease, and in mind for his family, did not disdain to snatch at any of those creature comforts which he could contrive to reach. He is, in his Lisbon Journal, the same person of whom Lady Mary Wortley wrote—"His happy constitution, even when he had, with great pains, half demolished it, made him forget everything when he was before a venison pasty, or over a flask of champagne, and I am persuaded he has known more happy moments than any prince upon earth. His natural spirits gave him rapture with his cook-maid, and cheerfulness when he was starving in a garret."³ Dinners are "good cheer" to him, in its literal sense. Fortune sent him a buck, and his favourite venison pasty

¹ [*Works*, vol. x. p. 207.]

² [*Ibid.*, p. 273.]

³ [Written on hearing of his death.]

comes to aid his "large hamper of wine." When they are wind-bound off Ryde they get finer fish than "those which adorn a city feast," and this afflicted, dying, but never despondent man, talks of "completing the best, the pleasantest, and the merriest meal, with more appetite and more festivity than was ever seen in an entertainment at White's." Nor is he affected only by sensual joys. Every beauty of nature fills him with delight. The sea has a peculiar charm for him; he thinks nothing on land can equal it, and a fleet of ships he esteems the noblest object of human art. They are becalmed one beautiful evening as they draw near to Lisbon, and he is hoisted upon deck to luxuriate in the scene.

Not a single cloud presented itself to our view, and the sun himself was the only object which engrossed our whole attention. He did indeed set with a majesty which is incapable of description; and, while the horizon was yet blazing with his glory, our eyes were called off to the opposite part to survey the moon, which was then at full, and which in rising presented us with the second object that this world hath offered to our vision. Compared to these, the pageantry of theatres or splendour of courts, are sights almost below the regard of children.¹

There is not much in his novels which reveals this part of his sensibilities, and we should not have expected it from one who had long revelled with the intensest satisfaction in the dissipations of the metropolis,—who had never failed to find raptures amid the fumes of tobacco, which he chewed as well as smoked, the jingling of glasses, and the noisy chorus of excited voices. His versatile emotions answered to every call of pleasure, animal or mental, and, wherever he was, he sunned himself in the ray which was shining at the hour, and, fixing all his attention upon the genial influence, enjoyed it in spite of the surrounding shadows.

His delight in the exhibition of character is everywhere — conspicuous in his narrative of the voyage. He discrimi-

¹ [Vol. x, p. 308.]

nates peculiarities with the sagacity of the novelist, and describes them with a novelist's art. When he expected to be drowned, his sole regret was that the world would lose his sketch of a military coxcomb of the very silliest order, who came on board at Portsmouth to visit his uncle, the captain of the ship, and who in his wisdom had that particular hatred of fools that he could not tolerate their company, and would never be seen with two or three officers of his regiment whose misfortune it was to belong to that unhappy family. The captain himself was a curious mixture of kindness and bluster, of good-temper and self-importance. When a kitten fell overboard he had the ship put about to save it, and when the same animal was afterwards suffocated in a feather bed, his lamentations resembled an Irish howl. Going one day to dine on board another vessel, he ordered a sailor to pack a quantity of small beer in the cabin, which Fielding resisting, because the intrusion was inconvenient to him at the moment, the man took boat, and went to complain to his master. Back came the captain, foaming with rage, and vomiting forth oaths. His insolence and abuse grew to a height which made Fielding resolve to quit the ship. He sent for a hoy to convey him on shore, and muttered the word *law*. At that ominous sound, a hero who had braved the roar of cannon (for he had once commanded a privateer) tumbled on his knees and implored for mercy. In their later confidences he confessed to Fielding that "he feared that with which he had been threatened more than any rock or quicksand."¹ Neither the captain himself nor anybody on board appears to have had the remotest suspicion how precious was the freight they carried. Genius is appreciated most heartily by those who make the nearest approaches to it, and these people were so far removed from the least participation of the talents which elevated their great companion, that they were lost to them in the distance.

¹ [Vol. x, pp. 295-7.]

From the time that Fielding set foot on shore we hear — no more of him, until we are told that he expired on the 8th of October, 1754, in the forty-eighth year of his age. It may be conjectured from all which preceded, that, while sense remained, the last spark of life continued to shine brightly, and to assert its predominance over the pain and feebleness which oppressed him, as though that final flicker had been the entire man. Nor did he want, we may venture to hope, the consolations of religion, for even while his conduct was dissolute his faith continued firm. One of the latest works he planned was a refutation of the posthumous and infidel philosophy of Lord Bolingbroke, and he had been at the pains of making numerous extracts for the purpose from the writings of the Fathers and other eminent divines. He is buried in the English cemetery at Lisbon, where a new tomb was erected to him in 1830, with the inscription—

HENRICUS FIELDING,
LUGET BRITANNIA GREMIO NON DATUM
FOVERE NATUM.

He left four children, and Allen not only made their uncle an annual allowance to assist in defraying the expenses of their education, but on his own death, ten years afterwards, bequeathed the mother and the three survivors a hundred pounds apiece.¹

¹ [Mr. M. Davenport Hill wrote to Elwin, Jan. 23, 1856, after a perusal of Scott's sketch of Fielding's Life, prompted by reading the Quarterly article: "I observe that, when speaking of Fielding's children, he says he does not know what became of them. One went to the Bar, and practised at the Old Bailey, within the memory of men whom I knew; but I never heard more than one anecdote of him, which was that somebody—one of the judges, I think,—at the Sheriff's dinner, which was given every day during the Sessions, speaking of books, said that he had long confined his reading to two—Horace and Tom Jones; a tribute to his father, which, being made unexpectedly and without thought on the part of the speaker that any of his hearers had a peculiar interest in the opinion, so affected the son as to produce a burst of tears. Probably he may have been old enough to remember that last and sad parting with his father, which no one who has ever read could forget."

This son was the eldest, William, born 1748.]

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W. Walker & Co. engravers, ph. 26

From Basire's engraving after a drawing by Hogarth.

Fielding was over six feet high; and his frame, before he was reduced by illness, corresponded with his height. No portrait of him was taken during his life; but, when he was dead, his friend Hogarth, to whom he had often promised to sit, endeavoured to draw his features from memory. He failed till he was shown a profile which a lady had cut in paper, when he made what Murphy terms an "excellent drawing, which recalls to all who have seen the original a corresponding image of the man."¹ The features are strongly marked, the nose extremely long and aquiline, the under-lip and chin unusually prominent, the lower portion of the forehead projecting, and the eyes expressive of a scrutinising acuteness.

"I cannot," says Mr. Thackeray, "offer or hope to make a hero of Harry Fielding. Why not show him as he is, not robed in a marble toga, and draped and polished in an heroic attitude, but with inked ruffles, and claret stains on his tarnished laced coat, and on his manly face the marks of good fellowship, of illness, of kindness, of care, and wine? Stained as you see him, and worn by care and dissipation, that man retains some of the most precious and splendid human qualities and endowments."² What the ill and the good qualities were Fielding has told himself, in his *Journey from this World to the Next*:—

The judge then addressed himself to me, who little expected to pass this fiery trial. I confessed I had indulged myself very freely with wine and women in my youth, but had never done an injury to any man living, nor avoided an opportunity of doing good; that I pretended to very little virtue more than general philanthropy and private friendship. I was proceeding, when Minos bid me enter the gate, and not indulge myself with trumpeting forth my virtues.³

The last stroke of humour is delightful, but there is perceptible in this passage, what his other writings equally

¹ [Murphy, vol. i. p. 82.]

² [Thackeray's *English Humourists*, p. 254.]

³ [Chap. vii., *Works*, vol. iv. p. 358.]

indicate, a disposition to look leniently upon the vices which were his bane. There is no need to take him for a text, and deduce a moral from his life. No one can have contemplated his shattered constitution, his broken fortunes, his ignoble shifts, his loss of dignity and respect, and not feel that the facts themselves preach far more powerfully than any homily which could be raised upon them. Without adducing his better propensities to palliate his worse, which, indeed, admit of no palliation, we may yet dwell with satisfaction upon his manly endurance, his brave self-reliance, his perpetual cheerfulness, his tender heart, and that instinctive benevolence which could not be surpassed by Allen himself. If one thing more than another could show the evil of the indulgences he practised, it would be to see how low they could sink a man in whom so much of goodness and of greatness had met together.

Walter Scott considered that of all the works of imagination to which English genius had given birth, the writings of Fielding were most exclusively her own. Not only did he pronounce them incapable of translation, but he doubted whether they could be thoroughly relished by Irishmen or Scotchmen who were not familiar with our country.¹ Foreigners in consequence have little appreciation of them. Voltaire said there was nothing passable in *Tom Jones* except the character of a barber. This faculty of reproducing national traits is a wonderful merit in Fielding. His men, in their tastes and habits, in their garb and language, possess in the strongest degree the piquant peculiarities of their time and country. But they are something more than national: they are individual also; each is distinguished with surprising skill from the other. It is not only Englishmen that you meet, but the particular Englishman, Mr. Abraham Adams or Mr. Thomas Jones. This is an art which, when carried to perfection, is one of the rarest gifts of the writers of fiction. It is easy to

¹ [Scott's *Miscellaneous Prose Works*, vol. i. p. 253.]

mark the personages by caricaturing them; it is comparatively easy to exhibit passions and feelings in abstract nakedness; but to show common propensities in connexion with the identical, unvarnished adjuncts which are peculiar to the individual, is as difficult to accomplish as it is delightful to contemplate. In this power Fielding has never been surpassed by any dramatist or novelist in any age or nation, and hence it is that, as Mr. Thackeray has said, "we believe in his people," and think and talk of them as though they were real existences.¹ But there is a higher point still. Characters may be faithful in all their parts and may be distinguished from each other, but they may still be the characters of commonplace people. The grades are infinite, and those delineations are at the top of the scale which represent beings who are at once natural and unique. Such are Falstaff, and Don Quixote, and Uncle Toby. Such are Parson Adams, Squire Western, and Partridge. They are thoroughly original and thoroughly human. They have the raciness and zest of perfect novelty, and, while they surprise by their singularity, they delight by their truth. In none of these cases can we imagine that the characters would have been drawn at all if they had been left unattempted by the identical persons to whom we are indebted for them. No one can suppose that, if Cervantes had not created Don Quixote, any subsequent author would have hit on the conception, or that Uncle Toby would have existed, if Sterne had died before Tristram Shandy was written. This is one of the tests of originality, and nothing can be more striking than its application to Fielding. He is confessedly the earliest novelist who drew from English life; he had the entire field before him from which to choose; and, rejecting everything commonplace, he gave us characters which are exclusively his own, and which but for him would have remained unportrayed to the end of time. It cannot be said of him, what has been said

¹ [*English Humourists*, p. 264.]

of Homer—that he is the greatest of poets because he was the first—that he had the world of images from which to select, and is rich because he enjoyed a monopoly. No future novelist was much the poorer for the appropriations of Fielding. Parson Adams and Squire Western, and a score or two more of the minor characters in his stories, would have been dead to literature unless they had survived in his page. Amid this crowd of personages there are no faint and shadowy outlines. The distinctness with which his people are conceived, and the vividness with which they are delineated could not be surpassed. They absolutely live before our eyes, and no squire or parson of any parish in England could be better known by the parishioners than Parson Adams and Squire Western to the readers of Joseph Andrews and Tom Jones.

Dr. Johnson objected that it was low life which Fielding described.¹ For this he himself has given the reasons. Comedy, he said, was his province, and the lower stations afforded the great variety of humorous characters.² Artificial manners, which concealed the real disposition, together with a monotonous round of formal entertainments, produced in high life a smooth insipidity unsuited to his purpose. Of pathos he has not much, and it is truly remarked by Murphy that, when he displayed it, “he operates more by force of situation than by tenderness of sentiment.”³ But in his own sphere, which is the rarest, the most difficult, and the most fascinating, he is rich to prodigality. The exuberant humour runs on in an unfailling current, fresh and sparkling to the end. A mere series of grotesque adventures, though he does not disdain them, would degenerate into farce. The larger portion of his comedy is the comedy of character, and, laughable as it mostly is, he does not, wonderful to say, outstep the modesty of nature. The selfishness, the vanities, the

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 237.]

² [Preface to *Joseph Andrews*.]

³ [Murphy, vol. i. p. 74.]

impers, the inconsistencies of mankind, are the principal themes of his ridicule. All the little deceits that we practise upon ourselves, and on others, are laid bare to the eye. "His wit," Mr. Thackeray felicitously remarks, "is wonderfully wise and detective; it flashes upon a rogue, and lightens up a rascal like a policeman's lantern."¹ He delights to show us hypocrisy simulating virtue, looseness affecting prudery, foppery pretending to gentility, ignorance boasting its learning, cowardice vaunting its bravery. Pleasantry, he held, should always be made the vehicle of instruction — should be employed to laugh society out of its vices and follies. Lucian, Cervantes, Swift, Shakespeare, and Molière, he honoured for the moral purpose which directed their humour, but he detested Aristophanes and Rabelais, who appeared to him to have had no other design than to lash sobriety, decency, and religion out of the world. There is nothing cynical in his satire, and its good-humour is part of its charm. He is a smiling and not a frowning corrector of mankind.

There was another particular in which Johnson was accustomed to criticise Fielding. "Sir," said he, "there is all the difference in the world between characters of nature and characters of manners; and *there* is the difference between the characters of Fielding and those of Richardson." "There was as great a difference between them, as between a man who knew how a watch was made, and a man who could tell the hour by looking at the dial-plate." "Characters of manners are very entertaining; but they are to be understood by a more superficial observer than characters of nature, where a man must dive into the recesses of the human heart." There is more knowledge of the heart in one letter of Richardson's than in all Tom Jones."² Johnson, from the violence of his hatred to Fielding, is no authority upon

¹ [*English Humorists*, p. 255.]

² [Boswell's *Johnson*, pp. 190, 238.]

his works. He called him a "blockhead," and when Boswell expressed his astonishment, he did not improve the assertion by the explanation that he meant "he was a barren rascal."¹ He has drawn, however, a just and forcible distinction between the simple delineation of external actions and the description of the internal workings of the heart. Gray, who had a fine discernment in criticism, agreed that the principle was correctly applied to Fielding and Richardson.² There is no accounting for his sanction of the judgment, except by the circumstance that where a man possesses some quality in a pre-eminent degree it masks others in which he also excels. To us it seems that we should be nearer the truth if we were to reverse the dictum of Johnson, and say that there was more knowledge of the heart in particular chapters of *Tom Jones* than in all *Sir Charles Grandison*, *Clarissa*, and *Pamela*. Richardson is minute, but his domain is as narrow as that of Fielding is wide; Richardson is constantly trivial and commonplace, Fielding is usually profound and original; Richardson is often false, Fielding is always true. Nothing can be more sagacious, nothing more subtle, nothing more nicely defined, than his representations of human motives, and it is because he attaches the doings and sayings of his landlords and village schoolmasters to the general incentives which pervade mankind, that he has communicated an undying interest to what, on the whole, must be called his unromantic and plebeian world. His reflections, which are numerous, would of themselves have ranked him with the Rochefoucaulds and La Bruyères.

Coleridge pronounced him an adept in composition.³ His style is certainly admirably suited to narrative, for it is translucent and flowing, and the language is simple and masculine, but there is frequently a want of polish, a care-

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 237.]

² [Rev. N. Nicholls, *Reminiscences of Gray*, *Gray's Works*, vol. v. p. 46.]

³ [Coleridge's *Table Talk*, July 5, 1834.]

less repetition of words, and particular mannerisms, such as the incessant use of the phrases "indeed," "in truth," which have a disagreeable effect. Nevertheless, he is one of the masters of our tongue, and would deserve to be studied for this alone, though in the dialogue of his personages it cannot always be called "English *undefiled*."

With a strong general similarity, each of his novels has its distinctive attributes. The purpose with which he commenced Joseph Andrews affected the whole of the work. A comely young footman, with no peculiar qualities, makes an indifferent hero. The plot is slight, and the movement of the story is little more than the progression of a journey, in which the principal characters meet with incessant adventures. But these adventures are excessively entertaining, and the inn-keepers and waiting-maids, squires and clergymen, attorneys and apothecaries, who play a part in them, are brought out with inimitable comicality and force. The central figure is Parson Adams. He is at once ridiculous and respectable; we laugh at him and admire him in the same breath. His athletic prowess, his readiness to use his fist or his crab-stick to resent insult and protect the weak; his absence of mind, his learning tinged with pedantry, his unconscious vanity respecting his sermons, his scholarship and his pedagogic abilities, mixed with an unaffected humility; his hatred of vice, his excellent heart, his liberality, heightened, and often amusingly heightened, by his poverty, combine to make him an exquisite compound of manliness, weakness, goodness, and absurdity. But chiefly he diverts us, and wins upon us, by his simplicity. The only world which he has studied is that of books. Of human beings he is as ignorant as a babe, and he has hardly any other means of judging them than by that which passes in his own breast. He imagines everybody to be as charitable as himself, as unsuspecting and confiding, and it is difficult to say which amuses us most, the

trust he puts in strangers, or the trust he expects them to put in himself.¹

Tom Jones is alive with characters and incident. Every chapter raises curiosity, and makes us eager for the next. All the events are unexpected, yet each grows out of the other in natural sequence. The bulk of the occurrences are of an ordinary kind; and it is the art with which they are disposed, and the bearing they have upon the main action, which sustain the unflagging interest. With the whole of the materials drawn from common life there is nothing in the details, the personages, or the story, which remind us of any previous writer. The originality in a man who had read so much without appearing to borrow a hint or a notion, is truly surprising. The plot is as admirable as it is novel. It is perhaps the only instance in which the solution baffles conjecture, and seems indeed impossible to ingenuity itself, and yet, confessed, when it comes, to be perfectly natural. Distresses continue to accumulate upon Jones at every stage of the narrative: he is ruined, as we should suppose, past all redemption, when, at the last moment, the complicated web is disentangled with matchless dexterity, and poetic justice done to all the actors in the drama. The main objection to which the plan is open is the exceeding number of chance coincidences, any single one of which

¹ ["One remark, it strikes me, ought to be made; which is, that Fielding never runs into caricature, although he sometimes advances to its very edge as in the lamentations of Parson Adams at the absence of his sermon on Vanity. The exquisite scene in which these occur would have produced the effect of caricature, had it been earlier in the work, but it is delayed until the reader has become so well acquainted with the character of Adams as to feel that the extravagance is within the bounds of nature. This absence of caricature is one, but only one, of those qualities in which Fielding is superior to Smollett. When the Commodore makes tacks on horseback, while hunting, because the wind is against him, we all feel that to be caricature, and, after the first reading, we never laugh at it. But the great weakness which I always feel in Smollett, is the want of that hearty good nature which beams through the works of Fielding. Peregrine Pickle is an ill-conditioned Tom Jones and more dissolute."—*Mr. M. D. Hill to Rev. Whitwell Elwin, Jan. 23, 1856.*]

might be not unlikely to happen, but which in their accumulation are most improbable. The defect, however, is diminished by the skill with which these occurrences are turned to account. In following the progress of the tale, even the headings of the chapters must not be overlooked. They frequently embody points of wit and we select an instance of the kind, which will at the same time serve for a specimen of Fielding's power of humorous narrative, even when relating the commonest events. /

Upon the whole then, Mr. Allworthy certainly saw some imperfections in the captain; but, as he was a very artful man, and eternally upon his guard before him, these appeared to him no more than blemishes in a good character, which his goodness made him overlook, and his wisdom prevented him from discovering to the captain himself. Very different would have been his sentiments had he discovered the whole; which perhaps would in time have been the case, had the husband and wife long continued this kind of behaviour to each other; but this, kind Fortune took effectual means to prevent, by forcing the captain to do that which rendered him again dear to his wife, and restored all her tenderness and affection towards him.

CHAPTER VIII.

A receipt to regain the lost affections of a wife, which hath never been known to fail in the most desperate cases.

The captain was made large amends for the unpleasant minutes which he passed in the conversation of his wife (and which were as few as he could contrive to make them), by the pleasant meditations he enjoyed when alone.

These meditations were entirely employed on Mr. Allworthy's fortune; for, first, he exercised much thought in calculating, as well as he could, the exact value of the whole; which calculations he often saw occasion to alter in his own favour; and, secondly and chiefly, he pleased himself with intended alterations in the house and gardens, and in projecting many other schemes, as well for the improvement of the estate as of the grandeur of the place: for this purpose he applied himself to the studies of architecture and gardening, and read over many books on both

these subjects; for these sciences, indeed, employed his whole time, and formed his only amusement. He at last completed a most excellent plan; and very sorry we are that it is not in our power to present it to our reader, since even the luxury of the present age, I believe, would hardly match it. It had, indeed, in a superlative degree, the two principal ingredients which serve to recommend all great and noble designs of this nature; for it required an immoderate expense to execute, and a vast length of time to bring it to any sort of perfection. The former of these, the immense wealth of which the captain supposed Mr. Allworthy possessed, and which he thought himself sure of inheriting, promised very effectually to supply; and the latter, the soundness of his own constitution, and his time of life, which was only what is called middle-age, removed all apprehension of his not living to accomplish.

Nothing was wanting to enable him to enter upon the immediate execution of this plan, but the death of Mr. Allworthy; in calculating which he had employed much of his own algebra, besides purchasing every book extant that treats of the value of lives, reversions, &c. From all which he satisfied himself, that as he had every day a chance of this happening, so had he more than an even chance of its happening within a few years.

But while the captain was one day busied in deep contemplations of this kind, one of the most unlucky as well as unseasonable accidents happened to him. The utmost malice of Fortune could, indeed, have contrived nothing so cruel, so mal-a-propos, so absolutely destructive to all his schemes. In short, not to keep the reader in long suspense, just at the very instant when his heart was exulting in meditations on the happiness which would accrue to him by Mr. Allworthy's death, he himself—died of an apoplexy.

This unfortunately befell the captain as he was taking his evening walk by himself, so that nobody was present to lend him any assistance, if indeed any assistance could have preserved him. He took therefore measure of that proportion of soil which was now become adequate to all his future purposes, and he lay dead on the ground a great (though not a living) example of the truth of that observation of Horace, which I shall thus give to the English reader: "You provide the noblest materials for building, when a pickaxe and a spade are only necessary;

and build houses of five hundred by a hundred feet, forgetting that of six by two."¹

Of the characters, Squire Western is perhaps the chief. The materials of which he is made up are few, and are far from promising. He is nothing more than a drinking Jacobite foxhunter, coarse in his language, and violent in his temper. The rare humour with which his anger, his ignorance, his headstrong wilfulness, and sporting propensities are set forth, redeemed by a certain heartiness of disposition, and a species of selfish fondness for his daughter while she ministers to his pleasure, keeps up our interest in him to the very latest page. The pedantry of Partridge, with his scraps of bad Latin, his babbling, his boastfulness, his cowardice, and kindness, is another exquisitely comical portrait. But it is endless to particularise. Blifil is one of those hypocritical villains who excite disgust. He is drawn with a masterly hand, and for that very reason his presence is always painful. Jones is truthful, frank, brave, and generous; but Fielding, in assigning him his own virtues, has equally fathered upon him his vices, and evidently does not feel that they degrade his hero. In his eyes they were simple indiscretions, pardonable improprieties. This is the most censurable blot on the book; for the coarseness appertained to the age, whereas the easiness with which he treats the misconduct of Jones is an offence against principle. This ill-disguised countenance of a debasing laxity of practice is an exception to the usual maxims of Fielding on morality and religion, of which he is an earnest and often a powerful supporter. Not a word can be breathed against the delicacy of his heroine. Sophia Western is one of the loveliest of beings. She has a bewitching meekness and gentleness, which never shine more than in the firmness with which she resists the marriage with Blifil, from whose acted sanctity her simple

¹ [Tom Jones, book ii.]

goodness shrinks with instinctive horror. Like the lady in *Comus*, she preserves a maidenly modesty amid the "rudeness and swilled insolence of the wassailers" about her. When the Squire begins to address her after dinner in his gross fashion, she rises from the table, and tells him that a hint from him was always sufficient to make her withdraw. This natural gracefulness never leaves her. She is unobtrusive to that degree that she hardly betrays a consciousness of self, not even of her beauty and charms. The character which Allworthy draws of her is worth transcribing as in itself a delightful sketch of feminine diffidence. |

I never heard anything of pertness, or what is called repartee, out of her mouth ; no pretence to wit, much less to that kind of wisdom which is the result only of great learning and experience, the affectation of which, in a young woman, is as absurd as any of the affectations of an ape : no dictatorial sentiments, no judicial opinions, no profound criticism. Whenever I have seen her in the company of men, she hath been all attention, with the modesty of a learner, not the forwardness of a teacher. I once, to try her only, desired her opinion on a point which was controverted between Mr. Thwackum and Mr. Square, to which she answered with much sweetness, "You will pardon me, good Mr. Allworthy, I am sure you cannot in earnest think me capable of deciding any point in which two such gentlemen disagree." Thwackum and Square, who both alike thought themselves sure of a favourable decision, seconded my request. She answered, with the same good humour, "I must absolutely be excused ; for I will affront neither so much, as to give my judgment on his side."¹

| Still more graceful is the admirable reply by which she turns his own argument against Jones, when at the end of the novel he is endeavouring to prevail on her to confide in his protestations of future fidelity. {

He replied, "Don't believe me upon my word ; I have a better security, a pledge for my constancy, which it is impossible to see and to doubt."

¹ [Book xvii. chap. iii.]

"What is that?" said Sophia, a little surprised.

"I will show you, my charming angel," cries Jones, seizing her hand, and carrying her to the glass. "There, behold it there in that lovely figure, in that face, that shape, those eyes, that mind which shines through those eyes; can the man who shall be in possession of these be inconstant?"

Sophia blushed and half smiled; but, forcing again her brow into a frown, "If I am to judge," said she, "of the future by the past, my image will no more remain in your heart when I am out of your sight, than it will in this glass when I am out of the room."¹

Nor were her fears without foundation. In what Booth was to Amelia we see what Jones, after his marriage, would have become to Sophia. She was a vast deal too good for him.

In Amelia, Fielding changes his ground. Rural characters had the prominent place in Tom Jones; in his last fiction he gives his London experience, and describes sponging-houses and prisons, sharpers and roués. Had he undertaken the task in the prime of his powers, his town might have rivalled his country portraits, but he was enervated by disease, and gradually yielding to a premature decay. The same hand is visible, but the lines are feebler, and the colouring less vivid. The plot, which is not to be compared to that of Tom Jones, still exhibits his skill in keeping up interest by a series of distresses, in which probability is no further violated than that they are crowded together. Amelia is beautiful in her feminine devotion and patient endurance, but we venture to think that the incessant parade of her perfections by her husband injures their effect. The attempt to exalt her virtue and beauty, by making her a perpetual object of dishonourable pursuit, would now be thought an offence against taste, but the contemporaries of Fielding did not share our ideas. Booth is contemptible. He may be more repentant than Tom Jones, but he is much less manly, and it is plain that

¹ [Book xviii. chap. xii.]

he will be duped by rogues, and led astray by profligates, to the close of his days, in spite of past warnings and his love for his suffering Amelia. Dr. Harrison, with the moral courage, integrity, and benevolence of Parson Adams, is too much below him in raciness not to suffer by the contrast. Amelia throughout is always reminding us of something better from the same pen, and, with its many excellences, we lay down the book with a feeling of disappointment after Joseph Andrews and Tom Jones. In force of character, in freshness of incident, in wit and humour, it is very inferior to both; in domestic pathos it is superior. Even if it had been altogether unworthy of him, which it is not, his claim to head the procession of English novelists would have remained the same. It is by St. Paul's and not by Temple Bar that we measure the genius of Wren.

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GOLDSMITH

THE essay on Goldsmith was contributed to the Quarterly Review in September, 1854. It was written, in part, as an act of friendship to John Forster,—ostensibly as a notice of his recently published *Life and Times of Oliver Goldsmith*. The paper was not, however, in any proper sense a “review.” It was an independent sketch of Goldsmith, though the materials were all to be found in Mr. Forster’s exhaustive work, and were no doubt chiefly drawn from it. The subject had already been dealt with in the Quarterly of December, 1836, on the appearance of Prior’s *Life of Goldsmith*. To avoid repetition, and perhaps also to secure as much space as possible for the more important parts of his career, the portions which were told in detail then were lightly passed over now. Consequently a scanty account is given of Goldsmith’s early years. The gaps in the life would of course have been filled in if, as was intended, the article had been republished. But, though interleaved for revision, nothing was done to it, beyond adding a short section on Grub Street authors, and crossing out the subsidiary page or two which had given colour to it as a review. These contained some complimentary praise of Forster’s book. In Whitwell Elwin’s subsequent *Memoir of Forster*, for the South Kensington Museum Catalogue of his Library, he agreed with Carlyle in giving preference to its earlier and shorter form, published in 1848, under the title, *Life and Adventures of Oliver Goldsmith*, and in thinking that where he was “encompassed by his ‘Times,’ the central figure was too much hidden by its surroundings.” “For,” he says, “in truth this delightful literary genius was not at all the moving spirit of his times, and the episodes, which had their own independent value, are digressions from his story, and break the thread of the narrative. The fascination of the extraneous details to Forster prevented his seeing that his portrait of Goldsmith, by losing its unity, lost something of its force.”¹

The references in the footnotes have been given to the fifth edition of Forster’s *Goldsmith*, 1871; to Cunningham’s edition of Goldsmith’s *Works*, in Murray’s British Classics Series; and to Croker’s one-volume edition of Boswell’s *Johnson*.

¹ *Memoir of John Forster*, p. 10.

GOLDSMITH

THERE was an anomaly in Goldsmith's character which has existed in no other celebrated personage in an equal degree. An Irishman by birth, he had most of the virtues and not a few of the failings which distinguish many of his nation—their love of low festivities, their blundering, their gullibility, their boastfulness, their vanity, their improvidence, and, above all, their hospitality and benevolence. But with this Hibernian disposition, he was an author after the purest and soberest models, chaste in his style and language, and calm and rational in his opinions. Those who lived with him found it hard to believe that one so weak in his conduct and conversation could display much power in his writings, and, as we learn from Dr. Johnson, "it was with difficulty that his friends could give him a hearing."¹ Posterity, on the other hand, who reverse the process and judge him from his books, have been reluctant to acknowledge that the man "who wrote like an angel could have talked like poor Poll" and there has been a tendency of late years to accuse his contemporaries of combining to exaggerate his absurdities. But whatever be the explanation of the contradiction, there is abundant evidence that it was real. His works remain to speak for themselves; and the account of his foibles comes to us from such a variety of quarters, that to deny the likeness would be to undermine the foundations of biography itself. Even if traits originally ludicrous were made broader in the repetition,

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 580.]

the general temptation to indulge in a caricature of his weaknesses is itself a proof that the qualities existed in excess.

The son of a poor clergyman, he was sent at seventeen to Dublin University, and for cheapness was compelled to enter as a sizar. If poverty is the stimulus to industry, industry is equally the solace of poverty. Study furnishes the mind with occupation, and removes the necessity for costlier and less worthy entertainment; but idleness aggravates penury, and is the parent of low diversions, lassitude, and debt. Such, from the indications which remain to us, appears to have been the college existence of Goldsmith. Any chance of his being drawn into the studies of the place was destroyed by the brutality of a tutor, who ridiculed his awkwardness and his ignorance, and who once knocked him down for giving a humble dance at his rooms to celebrate the small but solitary honour of having gained an exhibition worth thirty shillings. After nearly four years passed at Dublin, without pleasure, profit, or distinction, he took his degree of bachelor of arts, the 27th of February, 1749.

His father died while he was at college, and his mother lived in reduced circumstances at a cottage in Ballymahon. He was urged by his family to take Orders, but, wanting two years of the canonical age, he spent the interval at his new home. When he at last presented himself before the Bishop of Elphin, he was refused ordination. According to a tradition which rests upon indifferent authority, and which is contradicted by other accounts, he was rejected for appearing in scarlet breeches. The story was probably a jocose invention, suggested by his love of gaudy clothes, and the only intelligible explanation of the transaction, as Mr. Forster remarks, is that his knowledge was found deficient.¹ Instead of preparing for his examination, he had employed his two years in country rambles, in playing whist and the flute, and in telling

¹ [Forster's *Goldsmith*, vol. i. p. 41.]

stories and singing songs at a club which met at the Ballymahon public-house. His own predilections had never been in favour of the clerical profession, and he made no further efforts to enter its ranks. Mr. Contarine, a clergyman who had married the sister of Oliver's father, now procured him the situation of tutor in the house of a Mr. Flinn. Here he remained a twelvemonth, when he taxed one of the family with cheating at cards, and lost his office. He went back to Ballymahon with thirty pounds and a horse, started afresh in a few days, and reappeared at the end of six weeks with a worse horse and no money. His mother being very angry, he wrote a letter to pacify her, in which he professed to have gone to Cork, to have paid his passage in a ship which was bound to America, and to have been left behind by an unscrupulous captain, who "never inquired after me, but set sail with as much indifference as if I had been on board."¹ A train of adventures followed, the whole of which bear evident marks of invention, and show how early he began to display the talents which produced the Vicar of Wakefield. The Church and emigration had failed. It was resolved to try law. With fifty pounds, furnished by Mr. Contarine, he set out for London to keep his terms, gambled away his little fund with an acquaintance at Dublin, and was once more thrown back penniless upon his friends. The law was given up; but after a short interval they were hopeful enough to think that medicine might be attended with better luck. The money was again supplied by Mr. Contarine, and this time the reckless Oliver contrived to reach his destination, though it was no less distant than Edinburgh. He arrived there in the autumn of 1752, when he was twenty-four years of age.

It may be inferred from the previous and subsequent proceedings of Oliver, that he was neither very diligent nor very prudent at Edinburgh, but little is known with

¹ [Forster's *Goldsmith*, vol. i. p. 430.]

certainly. He remained there till the spring of 1754, when, led more by his love of roving than by his devotion to science, he resolved to visit the continental schools. "I shall carry," he wrote to Mr. Contarine, in announcing that he had drawn upon him for twenty pounds, "just thirty-three pounds to France, with good store of clothes, shirts, &c., and that with economy will serve."¹ Economy he never practised. Whatever pittance he possessed was usually squandered, and when he lived frugally it was because he had exhausted his means. A letter from Leyden to Mr. Contarine, which describes the mishaps that attended his voyage to Holland, whither he went instead of to France, is tinged, like the apologetical epistle to his mother, with palpable romance; and Mr. Forster suggests, we have no doubt truly, that it may perhaps have been dictated by the same motive—a desire to explain away heedless expenditure which might soon compel him to tax anew the purse and patience of his friends.² His generous uncle, however, seems shortly afterwards to have sunk into childishness, and his other relatives in Ireland were deaf to his appeals. At Leyden he managed to exist by borrowing, and giving lessons in English. He frequented the gaming-table, and once brought away a considerable sum, which was lost almost as soon as won. When he took his departure in February, 1755, he was obliged to a fellow-student for the loan which was to carry him on his way. Immediately afterwards he passed the shop of a florist, saw some costly tulip-roots, which were things prized by Mr. Contarine, and, solely intent upon gratifying his uncle, bought them at once with the borrowed money. It is these benevolent but ill-regulated impulses which have endeared the memory of Goldsmith to the world. In him the extravagance which ministers to gratitude, and relieves wretchedness, was still stronger

¹ [Forster's *Goldsmith*, vol. i. p. 436.]

² [*Ibid.*, pp. 54, 436.]

than the improvidence which grew from self-indulgence. "He left Leyden next day," says Mr. Forster, "with a guinea in his pocket, one shirt to his back, and a flute in his hand."¹

He took the course which he afterwards described in the Traveller, and trudged on foot through parts of Flanders, France, Germany, Switzerland, and Italy. In later days he used to tell his friends of the distresses he underwent—of his sleeping in barns, of his dependence at one time upon the charity of convents, and of his turning itinerant flute-player² at another to get bed and board.³ As no Englishman of his time could have seen so much of the interior life of the lower classes abroad, and been so intimately versed in their manners and feelings, it is surprising that among all his literary taskwork he should never have given a narrative of his continental adventures. It is stated by Mr. Forster that, after he grew into reputation, the booksellers for whom he worked were unwilling to have it known that the famous Dr. Goldsmith had been a mendicant wanderer. If this was the cause of his silence, they judged very ill for their own interests, and very falsely of public opinion, and the world has lost a more charming book of travels than has ever perhaps been penned.

¹ [Forster's *Goldsmith*, p. 56.]

² He was an indifferent performer, and, if we were to credit the story related by Sir John Hawkins, he was ignorant of his notes. Roubiliac, so runs the tale, pretending to be charmed with one of Oliver's airs, begged to have it repeated that he might take it down. The sculptor jotted some random dots upon the paper, and showed it to Goldsmith, who, after looking it over with seeming attention, pronounced it to be correct, adding, "that if he had not seen him do it he never could have believed his friend capable of writing music after him." [Hawkins's *Life of Johnson*, p. 417.] In contradiction to this, the author of an address to the Philological Society of London, published in May, 1787, and quoted by Mr. Forster, asserts that a gentleman of his acquaintance had often laid pieces of music before Goldsmith, who played them at sight. [Forster's *Goldsmith*, vol. i. p. 266, note.] The anecdote of Hawkins is not in itself very probable, and may be dismissed as apocryphal.

³ [Cooke, in *European Magazine*, vol. xxiv. p. 91; Forster's *Goldsmith*, vol. i. p. 59.]

The pedestrian tour of Goldsmith lasted exactly a year, and in February, 1756, he landed at Dover. He had increased his knowledge of men, manners, and countries, but he had brought back little which could aid him in his profession, except a medical degree that was supposed to have been procured at either Padua or Louvain, where the principal qualification was the payment of the fees. He made his way to London, and his first employment is believed to have been that of an usher in a provincial school. He soon returned to the metropolis, and offered himself to apothecaries to dispense their medicines. He had no other introduction than his mien and address, and it is not surprising that his ungainly figure, plain face, awkward manners, and shabby clothes, should have failed to recommend him. Such was the poverty of his appearance that, when he called shortly afterwards in his *best* suit upon Dr. Sleigh, who had been his fellow-student at Edinburgh, his former associate was unable to recognise him in his pitiful garb. His Irish birth increased the mistrust and stood much in his way. One Jacob, a chemist, who lived near the Monument, at last ventured to try him, and it was while in his service that Oliver renewed his intercourse with Dr. Sleigh. "When he did recollect me," says Goldsmith, "I found his heart as warm as ever, and he shared his purse and friendship with me during his continuance in London."¹ Through the agency of Sleigh and Jacob, he commenced practising in Southwark, and, in the language of Mr. Forster, became "poor physician to the poor." Yet, even in this lowly sphere, he was mindful of dress, and while with one hand he felt the pulse of his patient, with the other he held his hat upon his breast to conceal a patch in his coat. Either he failed to get a practice, or those who employed him were too needy to pay, and he abandoned physic to become corrector of the press to the famous Samuel Richardson. A printer whom he attended, and who worked for Richardson, is said to

¹ [Cooke ; Forster's *Goldsmith*, vol. i. p. 76.]

have suggested the notion, and introduced him to the novelist. This contact with literature did not assist to make apparent the latent qualities of his genius. The author of *Clarissa* was too much taken up with his own importance to have a chance of detecting, in his humble assistant, the powers which were to produce the Vicar of Wakefield.

In these several occupations the year was passed. The early part of 1757 found him usher at the academy of Dr. Milner, of Peckham, whose son was another of the fellow-students of Goldsmith at Edinburgh. He was now secure from want; but, to judge from the descriptions he has left of the calling in his writings, it was of all his shifts the most painful and degrading. "The usher," he wrote in the *Bee*, "is generally the laughing-stock of the school. Every trick is played upon him; the oddity of his manners, his dress, or his language, is a fund of eternal ridicule; the master himself now and then cannot avoid joining in the laugh, and the poor wretch, eternally resenting this ill-usage, lives in a state of war with all the family."¹ Mr. Forster, who quotes this passage, also quotes, from the reminiscences of Mr. Cooke, a barrister, who was intimate with Goldsmith during the latter part of his life, the still more significant fact that, though he was accustomed to relate the hardships of his obscurer days, he never alluded to the Peckham Academy.² The neglects and insults shown to his poverty were due to his circumstances, but the taunts of his pupils were a deeper wound to his sensitive nature, because they were directed against the man. The sketch of the usher he has drawn in the *Bee* is a palpable self-portrait, and it is a mark of his simplicity that he has generalised traits which were peculiar to himself. The office was doubtless often treated with disrespect, but the laugh which went round the juvenile circle, and extended itself to the solemn central

¹ [The *Bee*, No. 6.]

² [*European Magazine*, vol. xxiv. p. 92; Forster's *Goldsmith*, vol. i. p. 84.]

figure of the group, was especially provoked by the diverting originalities which distinguished Goldsmith from the rest of mankind. The oddity of language to which he alludes in the *Bee* was his Hibernian dialect, and it was remarked by his friend Mr. Cooke that to the close of his life he was careful to retain it in all its original force. A curious instance of his ignorance of English pronunciation occurs in one of his early reviews, in which he takes a poet to task for making *key* rhyme with *be*. He had then no idea that it had any other sound than his native Irish *kay*.¹

The tricks which the pupils played off upon Oliver he retaliated on the footman, who was weak in intellect and ludicrously vain. As he prided himself upon his eating and drinking feats, Goldsmith rolled some white cheese into the shape of a candle-end, and inserting a bit of blackened paper for a wick, he placed it by the remnant of a true tallow dip. "You eat that piece of candle," he said to the footman, "and I will eat this." Goldsmith set the example, and with a wry face ate up his cheese by mouthfuls. When he had nearly done, the footman swallowed his own piece of candle at a single desperate gulp, and began to triumph over the protracted nausea of his antagonist. "Why truly, William," replied Goldsmith, "my bit of candle was no other than a bit of very nice Cheshire cheese, and therefore, William, I was unwilling to lose the relish of it." After practical jokes like these from a man of twenty-nine, it was an inevitable consequence that usher Oliver and footman William should be treated by the boys with about equal respect. But the old halo of benevolence which surrounds him everywhere shines out here, and his salary was usually spent, the very day it was paid, in charity to beggars and gifts to the smaller boys. "You had better, Mr. Goldsmith," said Mrs. Milner at last, "let me keep your money for you, as

¹ [Forster's *Goldsmith*, vol. ii. p. 320.]

I do for some of the young gentlemen." "In truth, madam," he replied, "there is equal need."¹

It was while he was at Peckham that the circumstance occurred which brought him into connection with his real vocation. Dr. Milner was a contributor to the *Monthly Review*, and Griffiths, the proprietor, when dining at his table, was so far impressed by the conversation of Goldsmith, that he asked him to furnish a few specimens of criticism. The result was his removal from the establishment of Dr. Milner to that of Mr. Griffiths. To exchange the mechanical drudgery of hearing the *Delectus*, and correcting the nonsense verses of little boys, for the more intellectual drudgery of writing for the press was probably considered by himself an elevation at the moment. Goldsmith declared that it was not till a year or two later that he discovered his talents for literature. He had, indeed, sent his brother Henry, in a letter from abroad, the first brief draught of the *Traveller*, but it drew forth no praise from the family circle, and did not add to their hopes of the scapegrace Oliver. He had again in January, 1757, according to the statement of Dr. Farr,² called upon him to read the commencement of a tragedy, upon which he had previously taken the opinion of Richardson, but he appears to have received no encouragement to proceed, nor is there the slightest trace, since he sold ballads when at college for five shillings apiece to the street-singers of Dublin, that in any of his distresses he ever dreamt of eking out his subsistence by his pen. It was not Goldsmith conscious of his genius that let himself out to Griffiths, but Goldsmith the butt of acquaintances and the laughing-stock of schoolboys.

Goldsmith entered upon his new functions at the end of April, 1757, having engaged himself for a twelvemonth. He was to lodge and board with the bookseller, and to receive a small salary, on condition that he went every

¹ [Forster's *Goldsmith*, vol. i. p. 84.]

² [*Percy Memoir*, p. 39.]

morning to his desk and wrote without intermission for the Monthly Review. He plied his pen regularly from nine to two, and on special days of the week from early dawn till late at night. But the hours and the manuscript were insufficient to please his taskmaster, who insisted on the tale of bricks and rated him with the cry, "You are idle, you are idle." The bondsman had not the compensation of feeling that his own conceptions of good writing had been fulfilled. His ambition was defeated by Mr. and Mrs. Griffiths, both of whom altered and interpolated his articles. The interference of the female dragon was habitual. Smollett, who edited the Critical Review, printed a letter, in 1757, with the heading, "To the old Gentlewoman who directs the Monthly," and two years later he replied to an attack from the rival journal by the boast that his contributors were "unconnected with book-sellers, and unawed by old women."¹ The supervision of the coarse, illiterate Griffiths excites indignation. The systematic meddling of his vulgar old wife,—however galling to Goldsmith,—begets a mingled emotion of laughter and amazement. It is ludicrous to contemplate this antiquated housekeeper, remodelling with magisterial complacency the happy graces of an exquisite genius, and it is impossible not to smile at the notion that the public listened, as to an oracle, to decrees which, if uttered in her proper person over a tea-table, would have been heard with contempt.

The hardships under which the man of letters carried on his occupation multiplied exceedingly the difficulties and the toil. Savage composed his tragedy of Sir Thomas Overbury in the streets, for lack of a lodging. He wrote the speeches upon scraps of paper picked up by chance, and with pen and ink which he borrowed for a few moments at the counters of shops.² Those who were not absolute outcasts were distracted by embarrassments, and

¹ Forster's *Goldsmith*, vol. i. pp. 100, 120, 149.

² Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*, ed. Cunningham, vol. ii. p. 357.

were denied the ease of mind which is essential to concentration of thought and continuous industry. "A man," says Johnson, "doubtful of his dinner, and trembling at a creditor, is not much disposed to abstracted meditation or remote enquiries."¹ To render his task more distasteful, he was seldom permitted to engage upon the topics of his choice. He had to decide between short ephemeral pieces which brought a quick return, and the longer undertakings commissioned by the trade, who paid for the work by instalments as it went on. The bookseller in the Chinese Letters watches from season to season the demand, and having drawn up plans in accordance with it, and settled the title-pages, he directed his retainers to provide the appendant volumes.² The bent and studies of the author were of small account. Anybody was expected to turn his hand to anything. No manager would have ordered of Goldsmith his Good-natured Man and She Stoops to Conquer; no publisher would have bespoken his Traveller and the Vicar of Wakefield. Having suffered grievously from the system, he envied the "happy few who had leisure to polish what they write, and liberty to choose their own subjects."³ He could as little command the first condition as the second. The employer valued his journeyman for his rapidity of execution, and not for the beauty of his style. "A sheet is a sheet with the booksellers," says the scribbler in *Amelia*.⁴ The finer the genius of the writer, the more painful was the drudgery of throwing off hasty effusions, which revolted his judgment, and did injustice to his powers; or if he yielded to his fastidiousness, he had to pay in bodily privations for the satisfaction to his mind.

The idleness charged upon Goldsmith by Griffiths was the stock complaint of the sellers against the makers of

¹ Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*, vol. iii. p. 281.

² Goldsmith's *Works*, vol. ii. p. 255; [*Citizen of the World*, Letter 51].

³ Goldsmith's *Works*, vol. ii. p. 51; [*Present State of Polite Learning*, chap. x.].

⁴ [Fielding's *Amelia*, book viii. chap. v.]

books, and did not contribute to lighten the toil of composition. The author, in Fielding's description of the sponging-house, belongs to the class of impostors. He takes subscriptions for a version of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which was never designed to be executed. He translates books from languages of which he has barely a smattering, with the apology that "if he were to afford time to find out the true meaning of words, a gentleman would not get bread and cheese by his work."¹ Worse than all, he is one of the reprobates who deals in "scurrility, indecency, and profaneness,"—any wares that will sell, however foul and however false.² In the eyes of the publishers the flaw in his character is not his ignorance, his dishonesty, and his immorality, but the unpardonable circumstance that he is capable of getting tired. "He is a very good pen, they say," remarks the bailiff, "but is apt to be idle. Some days he won't write above five hours; but at other times I have known him at it above sixteen."³ Goldsmith, in the garret of Griffiths, might have sat for the portrait. The same accusation is preferred against Mr. Wilson, in *Joseph Andrews*, and with an additional inhumanity and injustice, which do not diminish the probability that they had a counterpart in the actual world. He translated for a bookseller till he had contracted a distemper by his sedentary life, in which no part of his body was exercised except his right arm, and when he became unproductive because a disabled workman, the bookseller warned the trade against him as "an idle fellow."⁴ Fielding was portraying scenes with which he was painfully familiar, and his narrative is history in the form of fiction. From the nature of the case, the charge was sure to be common. The bookseller assumed that the power of composition was a natural gift, in which the

¹ [Fielding's *Amelia*, book viii. chap v.]

² [Fielding in *Covent Garden Journal*, No 51.]

³ *Amelia*, book viii. chap. ii.

⁴ *Joseph Andrews*, book iii. chap. iii.

mind could act as freely and swiftly as the hand. He had an inadequate conception of the time which was required for research, for methodising materials, and for reducing them to shape. He had less comprehension of the irksomeness than of the slowness of the process. He had "little notion of the pangs of uncomplying thoughts,"¹ and of the exhausting patience which was often required to give fitting expression to ideas. Rapidly as Johnson wrote, he acknowledged that the act was an effort to which the author was dragged by necessity, and from which the attention was starting every moment to pleasanter pursuits. Fatiguing and arduous at the best, the employment was doubly harassing when the thoughts were distracted, when the health was deranged, and when the exertion was renewed too frequently, and sustained too long. Incapable of estimating the peculiar difficulties of the task, the publisher looked for the promptness and the regularity which were exhibited in other professions, without regard to the difference of the occupation. The craft of an artist is three parts mechanical, and to paint is rather a pleasure than a fatigue. The duties of a physician soon grow to be a routine, in which the intellect is exercised without being tortured. The barrister has his facts provided for him, and not only speaks to an audience which is far from fastidious, and is compelled to listen to him, but he has the comparatively easy function of addressing the understanding without the obligation to captivate the taste. Tried by these tests any writer, however industrious, appeared to a disadvantage, and it was imputed to laziness that he was not more persevering and prolific, that he did not sit longer at his desk, and get on faster while he sat.

A slender amount of work would have been equivalent to the wages of the author. But it was this very pauperism which placed him at the mercy of his employer, and the

¹ Goldsmith's *Works*, vol. ii. p. 43; [*Present State of Polite Learning*, chap. ix.]

more unjust the reproach the more it prevailed. For the same reason the scantiness of his remuneration had a tendency to lower further the price of his labour. "Necessity," says Johnson, "often obliged the learned and ingenious to submit to very hard conditions, and avarice frequently incited the booksellers to oppress the genius by which they were supported."¹ Constantly the poor hireling anticipated his earnings, and then to the previous ascendancy of his taskmaster was joined the power of a creditor over his debtor. The Grub Street population lived and died in obscurity, and no record remains of their individual griefs. Their common history must be traced in the annals of the few who attained to eminence, and we can see in the instance of Goldsmith the kind of pressure which was put upon the ablest authors, before they were known to fame, when they had contracted pecuniary obligations to their taskmaster.

In consequence of the coarse, ungenerous nature of the publisher who had secured Goldsmith's services, the engagement proved unpropitious, and at the end of six months was dissolved in anger by mutual consent. The bookseller taxed his scribe with idleness and independence, and Goldsmith complained of the authoritative airs of Griffiths, of the domestic parsimony of his wife, and of the unwarrantable liberties of both in retouching the articles he composed for the Review. These early productions have the graces of his style, though not in the highest degree. The substance is below the form. The criticisms and observations are often commonplace, never novel or profound, and his happiest ideas can scarcely challenge any prouder designation than good common sense. With exquisite taste in his own compositions, he never, strange to say, attained to much insight into the merits and defects of the writings of others. When his judgments are not false, they show neither nicety of discrimination nor keenness of relish.

¹ Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*, vol. ii. p. 381.

In the autumn of 1757 he was once more thrown upon the town, sleeping in a garret, and dating his letters from the Temple Exchange Coffee-house, near Temple Bar. He was tracked to his lodgings by his brother Charles, who, hearing a rumour that Oliver was up in the world, had decamped secretly from Ireland, to partake of this unwonted Goldsmith prosperity. The poor author made light of his situation, and said that the Campaign of Addison was written in a garret higher than his own; but Charles saw that he must seek for another patron, and was soon on his way to Jamaica. In a letter which Goldsmith wrote, in December, to his brother-in-law, Mr. Hodson, he speaks of himself as making shift to live by very little practice as a physician, and very little reputation as a poet. None of the poetry has been recovered, if indeed it ever existed, for his accounts of himself are not to be trusted. The only literary work which has been traced to him at this period is a short article in the Critical Review, for November, 1757, and a translation from the French, entitled, "The Memoirs of a Protestant condemned to the Galleys of France for his Religion," which was published in February, 1758. Even existence in a garret could not be supported upon the miserable proceeds of authorship, and he was fain to return to the Peckham academy. He reappeared in the school, under what we should have supposed to have been happier auspices. The health of Dr. Milner was failing, and the head-mastership devolved in great part upon the usher. To the increased authority he derived from this circumstance was added the consideration, which in the worst days of literature must always have been something, of having been thought competent to instruct the public through the press. Yet his situation was still uneasy, and the hope which brightened his prospects was the promise of Dr. Milner to procure him a medical appointment in India. He bid a final adieu to the Peckham seminary in August, 1758, and shortly after-

wards received the warrant which nominated him physician and surgeon to one of the factories on the coast of Coromandel. The salary was only a hundred a year, but the private practice of the place, which followed the official station, was an extra thousand. To raise money for the outfit, which he calculated would require £130, he had for some time been preparing, in his leisure hours, "An Enquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning in Europe." He wrote to his relatives and old companions in Ireland to ask them to obtain subscriptions for the work. Two or three of those from whom he expected most took no notice of his application, and verified the playful prediction in one of his letters of this date: "There will come a day, no doubt it will, when the Scaligers and Daciers will vindicate my character, give learned editions of my labours, and bless the times with copious comments on the text. You shall see how they will fish up the heavy scoundrels who disregard me now. How will they bewail the times that suffered so much genius to be neglected!"¹ It is true that the experience which these "heavy scoundrels" had had of the use to which Oliver put pecuniary assistance was by no means encouraging, true that any rumours which reached them of his proceedings abroad could only have exhibited him as a thoughtless idler or a mendicant vagrant, true that any tidings of his London vicissitudes must have surrounded him with the suspicion which always attends upon a man who is everything by turns and nothing long; but they also knew that he was as generous as he was improvident; that, if the situations had been reversed, they would not in vain have asked for themselves what they denied to him; that he had supported himself now for four years "without one word of encouragement, or one act of assistance"; and, what was most of all to the purpose, to invite subscriptions to a book was to give a practical proof that he was turning his talents to account.

¹ [Forster's *Goldsmith*, vol. i. p. 139.

While Goldsmith was anxiously waiting for his Irish supplies he had to disburse ten pounds for the warrant of his appointment by the East India Company. To raise the money, he wrote articles for the Critical Review. Two papers from Oliver's pen appeared in the number for January, 1759, but before they saw the light the warrant which was to make his fortune was withdrawn. The motive of this proceeding never transpired. That it arose from some cause which was mortifying to his vanity may be inferred from his always avoiding the subject, and from his assuring his brother Henry, in order to evade inconvenient explanations, that he had met with no disappointment in the business, though it was then three months since the warrant had been revoked. It was in November, 1758, that he was thus summarily set aside, and, lowering his ambition to his circumstances, the physician to the Coromandel factory presented himself, on the 21st of December, before the examiners at Surgeons' Hall, to qualify for the office of an hospital mate. A single unlucky candidate of all who applied that day was too ignorant of the rudiments of surgical science to pass, and that one was Oliver Goldsmith, Bachelor of Medicine, and late practitioner of physic in Bankside, Southwark. Who is to tell, after this, what rare qualities of mind may coexist with stammering ignorance and a plebeian exterior?

His examination at Surgeons' Hall soon involved him in an additional misery. He had no clothes in which he could venture to appear before a tribunal composed of the grandees of the profession. He opened a negotiation with his old master, Griffiths, who, in return for four articles contributed to the Monthly Review of December, became security to a tailor for the requisite suit, which was to be paid for, or returned, on a stated day. The stated day came, and found the clothes in pawn, and the four books which Griffiths had sent him to review in pledge to a friend. The occasion which reduced him to

this breach of his word was the arrest of the landlord of his wretched lodging, to whom he was in arrear. The bookseller sent to demand the goods or their value, and, as Goldsmith could return neither, Griffiths wrote him word that he was "a sharper and a villain." In an answer full of woe the miserable debtor begs to be consigned to a gaol. "I have seen it," he says, "inevitable these three or four weeks, and, by heavens! request it as a favour,—as a favour that may prevent somewhat more fatal." He denies the villainy, but owns that he has been guilty of imprudence, and of "the meannesses which poverty unavoidably brings with it."¹ The wrath of Griffiths was appeased by Goldsmith undertaking to furnish a *Life of Voltaire*, for twenty pounds, from which the debt was to be subtracted. The memoir, which was finished in a month, he himself called "a catchpenny,"² and it is certainly unworthy both of the author and the subject. Here closed for ever his ill-starred alliance with the bookseller, who was the first to start him in his literary career, and the first to make him feel the bitter bondage of the calling. There could be no equality for an author in bargains which were made under a threat of gaol, and with the terms "sharper" and "villain" ringing in his ears. There was hardly a professional writer, whose talents were sufficient to be good security for the loan of a few guineas, who was not at a similar disadvantage. The scribbler in *Amelia* had been five weeks in the sponging-house, at the suit of a bookseller who kept him in confinement till he had worked out a debt of eleven pounds odd. Yet, though the dread of the gripe of the bailiff enabled the creditor to dictate subject and conditions to a refractory scribe, the publisher was not a gainer by his oppressive dominion. Smarting under a sense of ill-usage, dejected by the feeling that money for which he slaved was already forestalled, impatient to

¹ Förster's *Goldsmith*, vol. i. pp. 156, 159-163.

² [To his brother; Förster's *Goldsmith*, vol. i. p. 165.]

be released from his bondage, and considering that any trash was worth the wretched price which was paid for it, the author wrote without heart or head, and showed by the inferiority of his productions how little could be extorted by tyranny from dependence. The unequal relation was injurious to both parties, and if the publishers were the greatest wrongdoers, it was only, perhaps, because they had the greatest power to do wrong.

Goldsmith said of himself that he had "a knack of hoping," but the multiplied disasters which followed close upon one another had nearly reduced him to despair. "I have been for some years," he said, in the affecting letter to Griffiths, of January, 1759, "struggling with a wretched being, with all that contempt which indigence brings with it, and with all those strong passions which make contempt insupportable. What then has a gaol that is formidable? I shall at least have the society of wretches, and such is to me true society."¹ "You scarcely can conceive," he wrote to his brother, in the February following, "how much eight years of disappointment, anguish, and study have worn me down. I can now neither partake of the pleasure of a revel, nor contribute to raise its jollity. I can neither laugh nor drink; have contracted a hesitating, disagreeable manner of speaking, and a visage that looks ill-nature itself. In short, I have thought myself into a settled melancholy, and an utter disgust of all that life brings with it."² It was through the very excess of the darkness which had gathered around him that he worked his way into day. He ceased to indulge in the tantalising expectations which had balked him so often, and, without further distractions, sullenly resigned himself to the only business for which he was fitted. If he had succeeded in entering the Church, he would soon have sunk in the eyes of his parishioners to the level of his clerk. If he had satisfied the examiners at Surgeons' Hall that he could set a bone,

¹ [Forster's *Goldsmith*, vol. i. p. 160.]

² [*Ibid.*, p. 164.]

he would still, we may be sure, have been a bungling operator, and the tormentor of his patients. He once threatened, when a Mrs. Sidebotham rejected his advice, and adopted that of her apothecary, to leave off prescribing for his friends. "Do so, my dear Doctor," replied Beauclerk; "whenever you undertake to kill, let it only be your enemies."¹ This was one of the true words which are spoken in jest. Johnson summed up the case when he said that his genius was great, but his knowledge was small.² "No man," he remarked again, "was wiser when he had a pen in his hand, or more foolish when he had not."³ He had never been a student, and he had not that aptitude for facts, and that tenacity of memory, which enables many desultory readers to furnish their minds without steady toil. The materials for his charming compilations were hastily gathered for the occasion, and, being merely transplanted, as Johnson said, from one place to another without settling in his mind, he was ignorant of the contents of his own books.⁴ Thus in common things he was below mediocrity, and he was driven to be either a literary genius or nothing. He was never any judge of his own qualifications. He volunteered to take a journey to copy the inscriptions on the Written Mountains, which had baffled every traveller, though he was not acquainted with a single letter of any oriental language living or dead;⁵ and he memorialised Lord Bute to send him out to investigate the arts and sciences of the East, for the purpose of importing improvements into England, though Dr. Johnson exclaimed that he was utterly ignorant of the subject, and would have brought home "a grinding barrow that was to be seen in all the streets of London, and fancy he had furnished a wonderful improvement."⁶

¹ [Forster's *Goldsmith*, vol. i. p. 395.]

² [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 244.] ³ [*Ibid.*, p. 663.] ⁴ [*Ibid.*, p. 581.]

⁵ [*Percy Memoir*, p. 40, in Forster, vol. i. p. 79.]

⁶ [Forster's *Goldsmith*, vol. i. p. 291; Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 661.]

Just before his discomfiture in Surgeons' Hall he had removed to a lodging in a pent-up little square, now levelled with the ground, which, embosomed in a mass of buildings between Fleet Street and the Old Bailey, seemed named in mockery, Green Arbour Court, and which was approached by a steep flight of stone stairs called Break-neck Steps. The houses were tall and tumbling, the inhabitants poor and filthy, the children over-many and over-noisy—in Mr. Forster's phrase, "a squalid and squalling colony." In this retreat he was visited by Percy, the well-known editor of the *Reliques*, and afterwards Bishop of Dromore. Goldsmith had been introduced to him at the Temple Exchange Coffee-house, by Dr. Grainger, the author of the *Sugar-cane*, and one of the contributors to Mr. Griffiths' *Monthly Review*, and Percy had detected sufficient merit beneath the unpromising appearance of his new-made acquaintance to think him worth a call. He found him, at the beginning of March, 1759, engaged upon his *Enquiry*, in a dirty room, with only a single chair, which he gave up to his visitor, while he sat himself in the window. As the conversation was proceeding, a ragged little girl appeared at the door, and, dropping a curtsy to Goldsmith, said, "My mamma sends her compliments, and begs the favour of you to lend her a chamber-pot full of coals."¹ A volume of description would not convey a more vivid impression of the society of Green Arbour Court than this single trait; and ludicrous as is the incident, the respectful address of the messenger is yet a pleasing proof of the homage which was paid him by the ordinary inhabitants of the square. The most complete picture which, perhaps, we possess of Grub Street life has come down to us in connection with Goldsmith. The majority of distressed authors were too obscure to find a biographer. Those of greater pretensions had either started from a respectable position, or had quickly reached a higher eminence.

¹ [Forster's *Goldsmith*, vol. i. p. 169.]

A single unwieldy figure, in the person of Johnson, was seen moving for years among the crowd of ill-dressed, ill-fed, badly-lodged, and insulted tribe, who provided the ephemeral literature and party pamphlets of the day, but maintaining in the midst of his poverty such unshaken fortitude, such lofty principles, and such rugged independence, that the characteristics of the class were very imperfectly shadowed forth in him. Goldsmith, on the contrary, had the habits and tastes of the class. After he had acquired celebrity, and was admitted to the society of men like Burke, Fox, Reynolds, and Beauclerk, he looked back with regret upon his former haunts. "In truth," he said to Mr. Cooke, "one sacrifices something for the sake of good company, for here I'm shut out of several places where I used to play the fool very agreeably."¹ He did not persevere long in resisting his inclinations out of regard to appearances, nor did he ever get clear of the shifts and expedients which attended his earlier struggles. He was merely destined to exhibit in his single person, as he rose, all the gradations in the lot of a bookseller's dependant, from the poorest to the best-esteemed.

At the commencement of April appeared the "Enquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning in Europe," upon which Percy had found him engaged in the preceding month. If the work were to be judged by the promise held out in the title, a more superficial and unsatisfactory production has seldom issued from the press. Though he had travelled through Italy, Germany, and Holland, his account of the literature of these countries, to which he devoted distinct chapters, was so extremely meagre that it really conveyed no information at all. He enlarged but a very little more on the books and authors of England and France. He took up the paradox that the decay of learning had in every age been produced by criticism, and stated that the chief design of his Essay was to

¹ [Forster's *Goldsmith*, vol. i. p. 395.]

persuade people to write what they thought, regardless of reviewers. Yet the bulk of his treatise has no relation to this position, which he has not supported by any plausible argument. The fact is, that he put his private life into his books beyond any other genius whom we can call to mind, and he had not derived his doctrines from a survey of Europe, but from his personal experience of Mr. Griffiths' establishment. It is this, in conjunction with the pleasing style, and some scattered observations of a lively truth, which gives an interest to the work, in spite of its imperfections as a critical and philosophic disquisition. He had seen that the praise and blame of the Monthly Review were dispensed in accordance with the mercantile interests and vindictive passions of Griffiths. He had become acquainted with the ignorance of the starving scribblers who hung about the shop, eager, for the sake of a job, to do the bidding of their master, and who, when left to their own discretion, mistook railing for wit. He had witnessed the pain which their censures inflicted, and the injury done to books by their oracular abuse. "No man," nevertheless, as Johnson observed, "was ever written down except by himself,"¹ and the worst that the ablest and most wrongheaded critic can effect is to retard for a little space a reputation which is not fully formed, or to shorten the existence of some flimsy publication which if left to itself would die a natural death. He dwelt with equal emphasis upon the wrongs of authors, complained of the contempt which was shown to them, pointed out the evils of their bondage to booksellers, and asked the great to renew the patronage of the preceding generation, when a dinner with Lord Somers procured invitations to Young the poet for the rest of the week. These opinions were natural to one who judged of booksellers from Griffiths,—of the respect paid to authors from the treatment experienced by the ragged tenant in Green Arbour Court,—and of the advan-

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 395.]

tage to be derived from the countenance of the nobility by the number of feasts which he hoped would accrue to men who were suffering, like himself, from hunger and neglect. But it is not now, nor, probably, was it then, in the power of any Mr. Griffiths to keep an author from fame who had the talent to deserve it; and, as for a system of patronising dinners, it has two fatal objections,—that it is not the needy, the obscure, and the struggling who would receive the invitations; and that any companionship of the kind which does not come about naturally from personal likings or sympathy of tastes, is a degradation instead of an honour.

The Enquiry attracted little attention. None of his other productions in the first nine months of 1759 have been identified, except a few contributions to the Critical Review; but in October he is found exerting himself with unwonted diligence, furnishing essays to the Busy-Body and the Ladies' Magazine, and writing the whole of a weekly paper called "The Bee," which alone consisted of thirty-two pages. The Bee expired after a brief existence of eight weeks. Though he had aimed at variety in his subjects, there was a uniformity in the treatment, and the objection made in the Monthly Review, that "the observations were frequently trite and common," is not unfounded. The best portions of the work appear to us to be the remarks upon acting, and on the habits of the spider.¹ Quantity and quality both considered, it is very creditable to the fertility of his mind, the readiness of his pen, and the elegance of his style. He must have had much ado to keep up with the press, and we are not surprised to learn that a visitor one evening entered the lodging in Green Arbour Court, turned the key of the door, commenced upbraidings, which were followed by a three hours' silence, at the close of which he came forth in good humour, and ordered in a supper from a neighbouring tavern, to reward the poor author, who had just

¹ [*The Bee*, Nos. 1, 2, and 4.]

completed his arrears under the surveillance of his employer. In later days he was a rapid composer, and whole quires of his Histories and Animated Nature flowed from his pen with such facility, that, according to Bishop Percy, he had seldom occasion to correct a single word. "Ah," said he to Mr. Cradock, who was anxiously weighing phrases, "think of me who must write a volume a month."¹ But at this earlier period he had an inconvenient propensity to linger over his work. "I could not suppress my lurking passion for applause," he makes George Primrose (who is the *alias* of Oliver Goldsmith) say, "but usually consumed that time in efforts after excellence when it should have been more advantageously employed in the diffusive productions of fruitful mediocrity. The public were more importantly employed than to observe the easy simplicity of my style, or the harmony of my periods. Sheet after sheet was thrown off to oblivion. All wrote better, because they wrote faster, than I."² It was to this very pains, which seemed at the outset to curtail his profits without advancing his reputation, that he owed much of his subsequent fame. The power to glean knowledge is a common accomplishment which is shared by the dull; the power to clothe it in felicitous language is an exceptional gift, and as justly prized as it is rare. The fault, or rather themisfortune of Goldsmith, is that his necessities seldom allowed him to take care enough,—that incongruous words, careless phrases, and weak and slovenly sentences, blot his beautiful prose.

On the 1st of January, 1760, appeared the opening number of the British Magazine, a monthly publication edited by Dr. Smollett; and on the 12th the Public Ledger, a daily newspaper, which was started by Mr. Newbery, the bookseller. Goldsmith was invited to contribute to both. He furnished about twenty essays to the magazine, and for the newspaper he wrote his well-known

¹ [Forster's *Goldsmith*, vol. ii. p. 85.]

² Goldsmith's *Works*, vol. i. p. 390; [*Vicar of Wakefield*, chap. xx.]

Citizen of the World. He usually provided two letters a week, and for these he was paid a guinea apiece. They soon attracted a certain degree of attention ; but we infer from his own later language on the little notice which his essays obtained, that their popularity was not great. "Whenever I write anything," he ludicrously said to Johnson, at some period which preceded the publication of the Traveller, "the public *make a point* to know nothing about it."¹ The plan which Goldsmith adopted in the Citizen of the World, of introducing an oriental commenting upon manners so different from his own, had been frequently tried, and, in the case of Montesquieu, with distinguished success. The absurdity of usages, which only appear rational because they are familiar, becomes strikingly apparent when they are described by a stranger with the wonder of novelty. This happy artifice comes to nothing in the hands of Goldsmith. His Chinaman is to all intents and purposes an Englishman ; and, whenever he attempts to make him speak in character, the failure is complete. It is simply as a collection of light papers upon the vices and follies of the day that the work must be regarded. As in all his speculations, there is much that is commonplace ; but he skims pleasantly over the surface of things, gives picturesque sketches of the men he met and the haunts he frequented, and intermingles observations which, whether grave or gay, bear the stamp of his kindly nature. The series, consisting of one hundred and twenty-three letters, was brought to a conclusion about the middle of 1761, and was republished in two small volumes at the beginning of 1762.

In the gracefully told story of the Man in Black,² which derives additional interest from its being in the main an epitome of the life of the essayist himself, he talks of his improvident generosity, and his discovery that the

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 580.]

² [*Citizen of the World*, Letter 27.]

way to assist the needy was first to secure independence. "My immediate care, therefore," he says, "was to leave my present habitation, and make an entire reformation in my conduct and behaviour." He removed, accordingly, towards the close of 1760, into better lodgings in Wine Office Court, Fleet Street, but the reformation in his conduct did not ensue. In everything which he wrote at this period he dwells upon the superiority of economy and justice over the misplaced liberality which puts the donor into the indigent circumstances of the person he relieves, for he had been smarting from the effects of discharging the debts of others with the money which should have gone to defray his own. In furtherance of his design, he boasted that he had exchanged his free and open manner for a close, suspicious air, and that he was now on his guard against the needy sharpers who, instead of picking his pockets, prevailed on him to empty them of his own accord into their hands. But he rightly called himself a mere machine of pity, incapable of withstanding the slightest exhibition of real or fictitious distress, and, however knowing he looks, his power to see through the clumsiest fraud was on a par with his firmness. He seems to have smiled at his own impotent resolutions in the moment of forming them. "One of the most heroic actions I ever performed," says the Man in Black, "and for which I shall praise myself as long as I live, was the refusing half-a-crown to an old acquaintance, at the time when he wanted it, and I had it to spare." This does not promise much constancy in the course, and no indication ever appeared that he had left his improvidence or his simplicity in his Green Arbour Court lodgings. Among other good deeds, he remembered the landlady to the day of his death, supplied her from time to time with food from his table, and frequently returned to the scene of his old one-chaired apartment, to cheer and assist her.

In evidence of his progress in detecting imposition, we

are told that one Pilkington, who had long preyed upon the easiness of his nature, and had exasperated him by his conduct, burst into his room in ecstasies of joy. He apologised for the liberty, but his fortune was made, and he could not resist hurrying to impart the glad tidings to his best and earliest benefactor. The Duchess of Manchester had a mania for white mice. She possessed a pair, and for years had been offering enormous sums for a second. Pilkington had commissioned a friend in India to send him two from the East ; they were now in the river on board the good ship Earl of Chatham, and in proof of his story he pulled out the letter advising him of their despatch. Nothing stood between him and independence except the want of a suitable cage in which to present them, and he could no more raise the two guineas for the purpose than pay off the national debt. Goldsmith protested that a single half-guinea was all he had in the world. "Ay," says Pilkington, "but you have a watch: if you could let me have that I could pawn it across the way for two guineas, and be able to repay you with heartfelt gratitude in a few days." Pilkington must have resolved to have his jest as well as his guineas, when he made poor Oliver the dupe of so gross a hoax. Two years elapsed, when he suddenly reappeared in a state of semi-intoxication at Goldsmith's chambers, and greeted him in the language of familiar friendship, at the unlucky moment when Topham Beauclerk and General Oglethorpe were honouring him with their company, and he was ashamed to seem intimate with the vulgar and disreputable importer of white mice. Pilkington had come to pay, not the guineas, but the "heartfelt gratitude." "Here, my dear friend," he suddenly exclaimed, as he pulled a couple of little parcels out of his pocket, "is a quarter of a pound of tea and half a pound of sugar, for though it is not in my power to return you the two guineas, you nor any man else shall ever have it to say that I want gratitude." Oliver, roused to anger,

bid him begone, and he departed carrying his tea and sugar with him. They never met again, but when Pilkington was dying, a messenger took, says Mr. Forster, "to the poor starving creature's deathbed, a guinea from Mr. Goldsmith."¹

Mr. Cooke, who relates the anecdote of the white mice, has coupled with it another illustration of the extreme credulity of his friend. He appeared late and hungry at a club, and, having eaten no dinner, ordered a dish of mutton chops for supper. His companions, to balk his eager appetite, drew their chairs from the table on the appearance of the dish, and gave sundry symptoms of disgust. Goldsmith asked anxiously if anything was the matter with the chops; but they evaded the question, and it was only with much pressing that they were brought to tell him that the smell was offensive. He rang the bell, covered the waiter, who quickly caught up the jest, with abuse, and, for a punishment, insisted, at the suggestion of the company, that the man should eat the horrible viands himself. A fresh supper was prepared for Oliver, who, soon regretting the vengeance he had taken, ordered "a dram for the poor waiter, who might otherwise get sick from so nauseating a meal."² What wild tales of things beyond his immediate cognizance would not a man believe who smelt the dish beneath his nose by the assertions of his friends!

In the lodging in Wine Office Court, Goldsmith, on the 31st of May, 1761, received for the first time to supper the great Samuel Johnson. Percy, who brought about the meeting, called for the sage, and found him in a trim unlike what he had ever witnessed before—his clothes new and his wig nicely powdered. Marvelling why the negligent Johnson should dress himself with such courtly care to visit an indigent author in his humble apartment,

¹ [Forster's *Goldsmith*, vol. i. p. 262.]

² [Forster's *Goldsmith*, vol. ii. p. 108; from Cooke, *European Magazine*, vol. xxiv. p. 260.]

Percy ventured to inquire the cause, and received for reply, "Why, sir, I hear that Goldsmith, who is a very great sloven, justifies his disregard of cleanliness and decency by quoting my practice, and I am desirous this night to show him a better example."¹ An addiction to foppery had been the former as it was the subsequent weakness of Oliver. In Ireland, he got the reputation of attempting to dazzle his bishop by a pair of scarlet breeches; in Edinburgh, as we learn from a tailor's bill which Mr. Forster recovered, he wore "rich sky-blue satin," "fine sky-blue shalloon," and "silver hat-lace"; on settling in London he was met by an old schoolfellow in a tarnished suit of green and gold; when his reputation was established, a waiting-woman at a house where he visited remembered him chiefly by the ludicrous ostentation with which he showed off his cloak and cane;² and when he was with a party of celebrities, such as Johnson, Reynolds, Garrick, and Murphy, "he strutted about bragging of his bloom-coloured coat," and announcing that his tailor, Mr. Filby, had begged to be recommended when admiring spectators asked who made his clothes. From the retort of Johnson that Mr. Filby was thinking of the crowd which would be attracted by the strange hue of the cloth, and of the credit he should get for producing a reputable garment out of so absurd a colour, it may be presumed that, even for those gayer-dressing days, it was ridiculously gaudy.³ It was, therefore, from no indifference to appearances that, for a brief interval, he resigned himself to a sordid style of dress. His pockets were empty, his credit nothing, and, making a virtue of necessity, he was glad to justify the meanness of his attire by the example of Johnson.

The year 1762 found him still working upon a variety of compilations for Mr. Newbery, of whom he said that

¹ [*Percy Memoir*, p. 62.]

² [Forster's *Goldsmith*, vol. i. pp. 41, 52, 77, 395.]

³ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 203.]

"he was the patron of more distressed authors than any man of his time,"¹ and a distressed author now and ever after was Goldsmith. On one occasion this patron paid him twenty guineas—"a sum," he said, "I was so little used to receive in a lump, that I felt myself under the embarrassment of Captain Brazen in the play, whether I should build a privateer or a playhouse with the money."² The embarrassment which quickly followed was of an opposite kind, and he had constant recourse to Mr. Newbery for loans. "These paltry advances," Mr. Forster admirably remarks, in language which ought to sink into the mind of every man who makes literature his profession, "are a hopeless entanglement. They bar freedom of judgment on anything proposed, and escape is felt to be impossible. Some days—some weeks, perhaps—have been lost in idleness or illness; the future becomes a mortgage to the past, every hour has its want forestalled upon the labour of the succeeding hour, and Gulliver lies bound in Lilliput."³

This was the period of the famous Cock Lane ghost. A clerk in a public office, prohibited by the law from marrying the sister of his deceased wife, lived with her in concubinage. She died of the small-pox in the early part of 1760, bequeathing her property, which was about a hundred pounds, to her lover. They had previously lodged in Cock Lane with one Parsons, a parish clerk, who borrowed money of his tenant, and, being unable or unwilling to defray the debt, he was sued by his creditor. The grudge which rankled in the mind of Parsons found vent upon the death of the woman, and he set his daughter, a girl of twelve, to assert that she had seen her ghost, and to counterfeit noises which were supposed to come from the "perturbed spirit." The final result to which the device tended was that the ghost was to knock, in answer to questions, twice for a negative

¹ [Forster's *Goldsmith*, vol. ii. p. 274, from Cooke.]

² [*Ibid.*, p. 105.]

³ [*Ibid.*, vol. i. p. 277.]

and once for an affirmative, and by this means to indicate that she had been poisoned by her paramour, and wished him hanged. The sensation excited by the farce, at the commencement of 1762, was immense. The Duke of York, Lord Hertford, Lady Northumberland, Lady Mary Coke, and Horace Walpole, went together in a hackney coach, and, though it rained torrents, found the lane full of people, and the house so crammed that it was impossible to get in till somebody recognised the Duke. While the frenzy was proceeding, Dr. Johnson, in conjunction with other persons of eminence, investigated the story. The ghost had never made a sign, except when the girl was present and in bed, and, the Doctor obliging her to place her hands above the clothes, the noises ceased. The spirit having very incautiously promised to strike her own coffin, which was in the church of St. John, Clerkenwell, the company adjourned to the vault, and called upon her in vain to keep her word. The exposure was complete, and Johnson drew up a statement of the particulars, and published it in the newspapers. The Doctor himself always spoke of his share in detecting the cheat with much satisfaction, but many, with Churchill at their head, laughed at him for thinking it worth a serious refutation. Parsons, for his infamous attempt to procure the death of his former lodger by a judicial murder, was three times set in the pillory at the end of Cock Lane, and imprisoned for a year. The mob, who were more ready "to take the ghost's word" than to listen to Johnson's reasoning, sympathised with Parsons, and collected a subscription for him. An incident which for weeks was the talk of the town promised to prove a popular topic, and, by an extant receipt for three guineas, paid by Newbery, Goldsmith was known to have produced a pamphlet on the subject, since discovered under the title of "The Mystery Revealed."

Shortly after Johnson had laid, and Goldsmith chronicled, the Cock Lane ghost, the worn-out author visited Tun-

bridge and Bath for his health. The king of the latter place, the notorious Beau Nash, had died the year before, and Goldsmith took advantage of the event to write his *Life*. He speaks in many passages of his personal acquaintance with him; and, though it does not appear when or where the meeting occurred, it is either a fact, or he must have received considerable assistance from the friends of the Beau. The literal report of his conversation, than which nothing can be more dramatic, and which of itself conveys a perfect picture of the man, together with the details of his habits and manners, could only have proceeded from a familiar associate. The merit of the biography is less as a piece of composition, a particular in which it is very unequal, than as a vivid portrait of the vanities, the follies, the vices, and—what was a redeeming trait—the charities of this poor slave and arbiter of fashion. He has neither exalted nor caricatured him. He describes him as what he was—"a weak man, governing weaker subjects,"¹ frivolous, insipid, petulant, and boastful, without steady principles or the lighter talents. People bore with his dominion because he was a useful manager of their amusements, and because they were conscious that they paid him but a mock respect. Goldsmith received for this biography, which is of considerable length, only fourteen guineas.

At the end of 1762, Goldsmith—urged, it may be supposed, by the necessity for fresher air and more active exercise,—hired, in addition to his London lodging, country apartments in Islington, from a friend of Newbery, Mrs. Elizabeth Fleming. To secure the landlady her dues, and to protect Goldsmith from the effects of his own prodigality, it was agreed that the bookseller should pay the board and lodging quarterly, and deduct it from the literary earnings of his author. What little money Oliver fingered was doled out to him in small sums of from one to two guineas at a time. No better arrange-

¹ [Preface to *Life of Richard Nash*, Goldsmith's *Works*, vol. iv. p. 42.]

ment could be made for a man who, in his own words, was careless of the future, and intent upon enjoying the present; but even this precaution, after a short trial, proved insufficient to ward off the old distresses. In the meanwhile, besides writing sundry miscellanies, he was busy upon a History of England for the young, in a series of letters. His mode of compiling was to spend his morning in reading such a portion of Hume, Rapin, and sometimes Kennet, as would furnish matter for a single chapter. He passed the remainder of his day with his friends, and when he went up to bed wrote off his forenoon preparations with the same facility as a common letter. With such a system there could be no deep research, comprehensive views, or profound thought. Nor does he pretend to anything of the kind. His aim was to produce a pleasing transparent narrative, and in this he succeeded. The "Letters" appeared in 1764 as from a "Nobleman to his Son," and were generally attributed to the first Lord Lyttelton, whose stiff and heavy composition had no resemblance whatever to the easy and often careless style of Goldsmith. The sale of the book was rapid, and, though superficial and inaccurate, it has never ceased to be a favourite.

Newbery's payments exceeding Goldsmith's earnings, the advances came to an end, and the landlady's bills were left undischarged. She was a woman in whom resolution was unmingled with tenderness, and, notwithstanding that the arrears were of short continuance, she arrested him, at the close of 1764, for her rent. When Boswell expressed his wonder that he who had obtained the title of the "great moralist" should be kind to a man of very bad character, Goldsmith replied—"He is now become miserable, and that insures the protection of Johnson."¹ It was to this steady friend of the miserable that he had recourse in his present dilemma, and when the messenger returned he brought with him a guinea and

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 142.]

the assurance that the moralist would speedily follow. Johnson found him in a violent passion, the guinea changed, and a bottle of Madeira and a glass before him. As they talked of the means of extricating him from his difficulties, Goldsmith produced a novel he had composed in his snatches of leisure, and Johnson, after glancing his eye through its pages, sallied out and sold it for sixty pounds to James Newbery, the nephew of the bookseller with whom we are already familiar. Oliver paid his rent, rated the landlady, and left her lodgings. Johnson thought himself that the novel would meet with but moderate success, and Newbery's opinion of it was not sufficiently high to induce him to print it. A manuscript, which was among the most precious ever penned, was thrown aside for the present, and half of Goldsmith's immortality lay exposed to the accidents which grow out of negligence.

But the day was now come when he was to emerge from obscurity, and gain that station among the eminent men of his time for which he had pined so long. The Traveller, which he had commenced nine years before when he was abroad, and which he brooded over at intervals with fond solicitude, was at last ready for the press. In 1758, when he was young in authorship, he told his brother Henry that poetry was easier to produce than prose,¹ which can only be taken as an indication that he was not then the ready writer of prose which he quickly became, for to the last he composed poetry with singular slowness. He used to say that he had been four or five years in gathering the incidents of his *Deserted Village*, and two years were spent in the process of versifying what he had gleaned.² Nobody would have guessed, when the Traveller appeared on the 19th of December, 1764, what months of toil lay hid in that little pamphlet of verse, which seemed as if it had flowed from the author's mind with the same facility that it fell from the

¹ [Forster's *Goldsmith*, vol. i. p. 166.]

² [*Ibid.*, vol. ii., pp. 117, 118.]

reader's tongue. But the labour had not been greater than the reward. In a few weeks it crept into reputation, and was equally admired by the many and the discriminating few. Johnson declared that there had been no such piece since the time of Pope, and Fox said later that it was one of the finest poems in the English language.¹ There is perhaps no other which combines an equal amount of ease and polish,—which preserves a juster medium between negligence and constraint. The sentiments and language are of the same mild and equable cast. There are no bold flights of fancy, no daring metaphors, no sublime ideas or penetrating maxims. The charm is in the happy selection of the particulars which compose his pictures of men and nature in the different countries of Europe, and in the almost unvarying elegance, and often the exquisite felicity, of the language in which these particulars are embodied. Many single lines are unsurpassed for gentle beauty of expression and for the distinctness of the image which they place before the mind. He excels, too, in those artifices of style by which the repetition of words and phrases adds melody and force. His verse is pitched in the key which suits with the general spirit of his poetry. It is less resounding than that of Johnson, but it has sufficient fulness of tone, and is all but uniformly musical.² For this delightful production, which he had been nine years in bringing to maturity, and which passed through

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, pp. 174, 580.]

² "There is not," said Langton, "a bad line in that poem of the Traveller; not one of Dryden's careless verses." [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 580.] He must have forgotten the last line of the following couplet, which ought to have been intolerable to the fine ear of Goldsmith:—

As different good, by Art or Nature given,
To different nations, makes their blessings even.

The passage cost him considerable trouble, for he expunged the version which stands in the first edition, and the couplet we have quoted makes part of the second attempt. The few additions he owed to Johnson are excellent, and one line especially, which he introduced into Goldsmith's description of the wanderer lost in the forest, and dreading destruction from Indians or wild

nine editions during his life, he received of Mr. Newbery twenty guineas. Whether he reserved to himself any future share of the profits is uncertain; but we question if an obscure author, which he then was, would obtain a larger equivalent in the present day for the copyright of a poem of the same length and merit. It is the success of the publication which makes the sum appear small, while Newbery had to consider the risk of loss as well as the chance of gain. Johnson got but ten guineas for his *London*, and only five more for his *Vanity of Human Wishes*.

The Traveller was inscribed to the brother to whom the first sketch was sent from Switzerland, and who is addressed in the opening lines of the poem in as magical language as was ever dictated by genius and affection combined. Henry Goldsmith was seven years older than Oliver, and something of the respect which would be paid to a parent seems to have mingled with the fraternal love of the younger; for not only in his public dedication, but in a private letter, he calls him "Dear *Sir*." He soon afterwards gave a proof of his attachment. The Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland—the Earl of Northumberland—hearing that the author of the Traveller was a native of that country, sent for him, and offered to promote his advancement, to which Goldsmith replied that he had a brother, a clergyman, who stood in need of help. "As for myself," said Oliver to Sir John Hawkins, who was waiting in the outer room, "I look to the booksellers for

beasts, is admirable for its terseness, its melody, and the vivid picture which it presents of a man struggling between terror and fatigue.

There, while above the giddy tempest flies,
And all around distressful yells arise,
The pensive exile, bending with his woe,
To stop too fearful, and too faint to go,
Casts a long look where England's glories shine,
And bids his bosom sympathise with mine.

The expression in the last of these lines is affected, and a few more exceptions could be found to Langton's remark.

support ; they are my best friends, and I am not inclined to forsake them for others.”¹ He was feeling then the first flush of satisfaction from the increased estimation in which he was held by the trade, and the more liberal offers which came thick upon him ; but the power of his name only served in the end to increase his embarrassments. He employed it to raise larger sums and contract more numerous obligations, while the money was quickly spent and the obligations remained. In the compassion which is excited by the distresses of Goldsmith, it must never be forgotten that many of them were the result of his own misconduct ; and, we fear, if a debtor and creditor account were struck, it would be found at the close that, in money dealings, he had been guilty of greater injustice to others than had ever been committed against himself.

In 1763 was established what many years later received the title of the Literary Club, but which at first was called the Turk’s Head Club, from the name of the tavern where it met. It was settled by its founders, Johnson and Reynolds, that it should consist of such men that, if only two of them attended, they should have the ability to entertain one another. Goldsmith was among the nine original members, and owed this honour to the influence and recommendation of Johnson, who, in the same year, said of him to Boswell, “He is one of the first men we now have as an author, and he is a very worthy man too. He has been loose in his principles, but he is coming right.”² But this opinion of his literary attainments was that of Johnson himself, and not of the world. What he had hitherto written had been published anonymously, and, if Hawkins is to be believed, when he was mentioned for the club, the notion prevailed that he was a mere bookseller’s drudge, incapable of anything higher than translating or compiling.³ Admitted

¹ [Hawkins’s *Life of Johnson*, p. 419.]

² [Boswell’s *Johnson*, p. 139.]

³ [Hawkins’s *Life of Johnson*, p. 420.]

at first upon sufferance, he was now become, by the publication of his poem, among the ornaments of the society. The attention he began to receive is shown in his amusing and characteristic speech, when Kelly introduced himself to him at the Temple Exchange Coffee-house, and asked him to dinner. "I would with pleasure," said Goldsmith, "accept your kind invitation, but, to tell you the truth, my dear boy, my Traveller has found me a home in so many places, that I am engaged, I believe, three days. Let me see—to-day I dine with Edmund Burke, to-morrow with Dr. Nugent, and the next day with Topham Beauclerk; but I'll tell you *what I'll do for you*, I'll dine with you Saturday."¹ About the same time Lloyd, the friend of Churchill, accosted him in a tavern, and, claiming his acquaintance as a brother poet, invited him to a supper-party in the evening. Long after midnight Goldsmith heard the voice of his host in altercation with a man in the passage, and, hastening to the support of his new friend, found that the landlord of the house, to whom Lloyd was already in debt, was refusing to trust him for the reckoning. "Pho, pho, my dear boy!" exclaimed Goldsmith, "let's have no more words about the matter"; and, turning to the landlord, asked him if he would take his pledge for the amount. "Most certainly, Doctor," said the man, "and for as much more as you like." "Why, then," rejoined Lloyd, "send in another cast of wine, and add it to the bill." With this bill the landlord presented himself in due course at Goldsmith's door, and he discovered too late that the evening's entertainment had, in every sense of the word, been at his expense.²

Among other effects of his growing fame, it was now that he resolved his dress should be worthy of his reputation, and he appeared in purple silk smallclothes, a scarlet great-coat, and a physician's wig. He carried a gold-

¹ [Forster's *Goldsmith*, vol. ii. p. 111, from Cooke.]

² [*Ibid.*, vol. i. p. 264, note.]

headed cane, the badge of his calling, in his hand, and a sword, which was never combined with this professional symbol, hung at his side. The weapon was so disproportioned to his diminutive stature that a coxcomb who passed him in the Strand called to his companion "to look at that fly with a long pin stuck through it." Goldsmith not only descended to a retort, and cautioned the passengers against that "brace of pickpockets," but stepped from the footpath into the roadway, half drew his sword, and invited the jester to a mortal combat. The fops slunk away amid the hootings of the spectators; and the story has been told as an instance of the manly valour of Goldsmith. Such a vapouring challenge, in a crowded street where a duel was impossible, seems to us to be only a proof of his extreme indiscretion.¹

Goldsmith, in the early part of 1764, left his town lodging in Wine Office Court, for Garden Court, in the Temple, where he shared his rooms with the butler of the society. Ashamed of their mean appearance, he observed apologetically to Johnson, "I shall soon be in better chambers, sir, than these." "Nay, sir," said Johnson, "never mind that. *Nil te quæsieris extra.*"² When the sudden success of the Traveller changed his position in the world, he removed to more decent apartments in the same court. His country quarters were, first, in a room of Canonbury Tower, Islington, and next, in a small house in the Edgware Road, which he shared with one Bott, a barrister, described by Cooke as "an intimate literary friend." His labours during 1765, and a large portion of 1766, have left little trace, and, unless we had known that he was compelled to write to live, we should have inferred that he had resigned himself to the indolent enjoyment of his fame. It is conjectured, from a memorandum by Newbery, that he drew up at this time the rough draft of the work entitled "A Survey of Experimental

¹ [Forster's *Goldsmith*, vol ii. p. 252.]

² [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 663.]

Philosophy," which was not published till after his death, and which, small as is now its scientific value, may still be read with pleasure, for that translucent style and felicity of expression which throw a literary charm over even the rigid facts of natural philosophy. He made a selection of Poems for Young Ladies, in 1766, for which he had ten guineas, and for another compilation of the same kind, in 1767, he was paid fifty. For the latter he told Mr. Cooke he got two hundred pounds, just as three years before he assured Boswell that he had received four hundred for the Vicar of Wakefield.¹ He must often have paid dearly for these false pretences. The mention of such large sums would invite applications from needy friends, which, with his easy disposition and his anxiety to make good his boast, he would be unable to resist. Though the two hundred pounds was a fable, he assigned an excellent reason why so slight a task should be so liberally rewarded. "A man," he said, "shows his judgment in these selections, and he may often be twenty years of his life cultivating that judgment."

On the 27th of March, 1766, the Vicar of Wakefield appeared, and ran through three editions in the year. Its excellence, therefore, was recognised at once, but it was not at first what it has since become, one of the most popular books in the English language. Garrick said there was nothing to be learned from it; Johnson called it "a mere fanciful performance"; and Burke, in praising it, seems to have specified its pathos as its distinguishing merit.² When Johnson said it was fanciful, he alluded, we presume, to the construction of the story, which is full of improbabilities. The accumulated miseries which befall the vicar and his family, and their strange and rapid return to prosperity, have often been mentioned as passing the bounds of ordinary experience. The majority, indeed,

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 141; *European Magazine*, vol. xxiv. p. 94.]

² [Forster's *Goldsmith*, vol. i. p. 424, from *Garrick Correspondence*, vol. ii. pp. 492-4.]

of the principal incidents arise from a series of chances, which, separately, were not unlikely to happen, but which, in conjunction, cease to be natural. When the vicar is supping with the servants at the fine mansion, and the master and mistress unexpectedly return, it saves him from discomfiture that they enter accompanied by the object of his son's attachment, Miss Arabella Wilmot. When the whole party go to witness the performance of the strolling players, this son stands before him as one of the actors. When he continues his journey, and stops at night at a little public-house, he hears the landlady abuse a poor lodger in the garret, and recognises his lost daughter in the suppliant's voice. Such wonderful meetings are set thick in the tale. The characters themselves, in several particulars, are overdone. The simplicity of the vicar is delightful, but when he mistakes such a servant as Goldsmith has drawn for the owner of the house, and such women of the town for London fine ladies, the credulity of Dr. Primrose is much too great for that of the reader. Sir William Thornhill is represented as a good and sensible man, but he shows himself to be neither when he abandons his estate to a monster like his nephew, and permits the vicar to be crushed by miseries he could have averted or relieved. Yet in spite of these, and numerous other blemishes of the same description, the story, from first to last, leaves a pervading sense of beauty upon the mind. This is in a large degree due to the running commentary of wise and gentle sentiments which gives the tone to the narrative, and to the charm of the serene and finished style, of what is by far the finest specimen of Goldsmith's prose. If an objection is to be made, it is that the neatness is so uniform that it grows monotonous. But its highest excellence is as a representation of domestic life, painted with the smoothness and minute fidelity of a Dutch picture. It is a phase of humanity which lies within the experience, and carries with it the sympathy, of nearly all the world, and

is not the less relished that the family, with more than an ordinary amount of the amiability, have their full share of the petty weaknesses of their class. The vicar is the most perfect character in the book, but while we love him for his benevolence, his resignation, and his cheerfulness, we smile at the contrast between the sense of his conversation and the simplicity of his conduct, at the wise maxims which he utters on every occasion, and which on every occasion are overruled by the pertinacity of his wife and daughters. Nothing else in the tale equals the skill and humour with which Goldsmith has depicted the vanities and stratagems of the female part of the establishment, and especially of poor Mrs. Primrose herself, whom he barely manages to redeem from contempt. The nature, however, which he describes, is what lies chiefly upon the surface. He did not attempt to sound the depths of the heart, which is the faculty that Johnson valued most in a novelist, and the want of it in Goldsmith was a principal cause of his low estimation of the Vicar of Wakefield. Much as Oliver had seen of life, he had no great power of seizing character. He never was able to travel far beyond the circle of his early home. The vicar was his father, and out of his not very complex self he has contrived to furnish two characters—George Primrose and Sir William Thornhill. Even these materials were not employed for the first time. He had drawn extensively upon them before, in the story of the Man in Black, and in other portions of his miscellaneous writings. If the male characters were family portraits, there can be little question that Mrs. Primrose had a strong resemblance to his mother, and Olivia and Sophia to his sisters; for, since he left Ireland, he had never sat at a domestic hearth, and had had no later experience of the female life he describes.

The pecuniary obligations of Goldsmith continued to increase with his years, and he was recommended to write for the stage,—a successful play at that period producing

far larger profits to the author than any other species of literary composition. He acted on the advice, and having completed in 1767 his comedy of the Good-natured Man, offered it to Garrick. Davies informs us that Johnson took pleasure in introducing Goldsmith to his eminent acquaintances, but he had not brought him into contact with his old pupil, for a bad feeling had long existed between the actor and the poet. It was the latter that laid the foundation of the ill-will, by commenting with severity upon the treatment which dramatists received from managers, in a passage of his Essay upon Polite Learning that was aimed at Garrick. Shortly afterwards the office of secretary to the Society of Arts and Sciences became vacant, and Goldsmith, not very delicately, called upon the subject of his censure, who was a perfect stranger to him, and requested his vote. The manager replied that he had deprived himself of all claim to his support by an unprovoked attack. "In truth," Goldsmith said, "he had spoken his mind, and he believed he was very right." They parted with outward civility and mutual irritation, and met no more until they were put into communication by Reynolds, with a view to get the Good-natured Man upon the stage. Garrick, according to Davies, expected to be courted, and Goldsmith was determined not to fawn. Differences soon broke out between them. Garrick demanded alterations, Goldsmith was pertinacious in refusing to make them, and gave only a modified consent in the end; Garrick proposed that Whitehead, the laureate—we cannot say the poet—should arbitrate between them, and Goldsmith rejected the suggestion as an insult. It at last came to an open rupture, and Oliver, after telling the actor that he suspected his conduct to be dictated by revenge for the old offence, withdrew his comedy, and sent it to Colman, the new manager of Covent Garden Theatre, who immediately accepted it. "I cannot help feeling a secret satisfaction," he wrote to his new ally, "that poets for the future are likely to have a protector

who declines taking advantage of their dependent situation, and scorns that importance which may be acquired by trifling with their anxieties." A little further experience of the protector of poets changed his opinion. The words with which Garrick concluded his part of the correspondence breathed a kindly spirit. "It has been the business," he said, "and ever will be, of my life to live on the best terms with men of genius, and I know that Dr. Goldsmith will have no reason to change his previous friendly disposition towards me, as I shall be glad of every future opportunity to convince him how much I am his well-wisher."¹

At Covent Garden the play appeared on the 29th of January, 1768, and was opened by a prologue from the pen of Johnson, in which Goldsmith was designated "our little bard." The epithet was as distasteful to his dignity as Pope's "low-born Allen" was to the wealthy proprietor of Prior Park, and Johnson, to humour him, changed it to "anxious."² Anxious enough he had reason to be, for the play long hung trembling in the balance, and at the scene of the bailiffs there burst forth a cry of "*Low! vulgar!*" which had nearly proved fatal to it. The irresistible comicality with which Shuter, who performed the part of Croaker, read the incendiary letter in the fourth act, coupled with the strenuous exertions of the poet's friends, who had assembled in great strength, saved the piece. But though not actually damned, it had only just struggled through; and the experiment was felt on the whole to be a failure. Goldsmith retired with his colleagues of the Literary Club to sup at the Turk's Head, joined gaily in the conversation, and, as he afterwards related, when he and Johnson were the guests of Dr. Percy at the chaplain's table at St. James's, "to impress them more forcibly with an idea of his magnanimity,"

¹ [Davies's *Life of Garrick*, vol. ii. pp. 146-52; *Garrick Correspondence*, vol. i. p. 306; Forster's *Goldsmith*, vol. ii. pp. 34-49.]

² [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 189 and note.]

sang his favourite song about "an old woman tossed in a blanket seventeen times as high as the moon." "All this while," he continued, "I was suffering horrid tortures, and verily believe that if I had put a bit into my mouth it would have strangled me on the spot, I was so excessively ill; but I made more noise than usual to cover all that; and so they never perceived my not eating, nor I believe at all imaged to themselves the anguish of my heart. When all were gone except Johnson here, I burst out a-crying, and even swore that I would never write again." "All which," remarked Johnson, taking up the conversation, "I thought had been a secret between you and me; and I am sure I would not have said anything about it for the world."¹ When his own Irene met with just such a dubious reception, and he was asked how he felt, he replied, "Like the Monument";² and he might well wonder at the voluntary exposure of a weakness to which his sturdier mind would have scorned to give way. The fortune of Johnson's tragedy and Goldsmith's comedy on their first appearance was nearly identical. As the introduction of the bailiffs had almost cut short the performance of the one, so the attempt to strangle the heroine of the other upon the stage called forth shouts of "Murder! murder!" which were with difficulty quelled.³ Irene, by the friendship of Garrick, lingered nine nights; the Good-natured Man, as Mr. Cooke relates, "*dragged through*" ten;⁴ and both dramatists received one hundred pounds, in addition to their theatrical profits, for the copyright of their plays. The sum derived by Goldsmith from the performances on his "third nights," which was then the mode of remunerating the author, was four hundred pounds. Without the direct testimony of Mr. Cooke "that the success of the comedy fell infinitely

¹ [*Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 245.]

² [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 61.]

³ [*Ibid.*]

⁴ [Forster's *Goldsmith*, vol. ii. p. 103.]

short of what either Goldsmith or his friends anticipated," we should have augured from the result that it had done by no means ill.

The indifferent reception of the *Good-natured Man* was not the only mortification connected with it. When Goldsmith commenced his literary career, sentimental comedy had possession of the stage. To be solemn was as much the fashion then as is the dreary attempt to be vivacious now. He waged war from the outset with the prevailing taste, and in his *Essay on Polite Learning* vindicated the humorous exposure of absurdities from the imputation of being low. The *Good-natured Man* was a practical attempt to give effect to his theory. At the same period the Hugh Kelly with whom he had promised to dine by way of "doing something for him," a man destitute of acquired knowledge, but with fair natural talent, commenced a play in the approved sentimental style. Though by this time they had advanced to considerable intimacy, Goldsmith was filled with jealousy and alarm at what he considered a rival scheme, and, being questioned by somebody as to Kelly's project, he replied "he knew nothing at all about it. He had *heard* there was *a man of that name about town* who wrote in newspapers, but of his talents for comedy, or even for the work he was engaged in, he could not judge." Kelly's piece, under the title of *False Delicacy*, was brought out by Garrick, at Drury Lane Theatre, on the 23rd of January, six nights before the performance of the *Good-natured Man*. "All kinds of composition," said Grimm, "are good except the tiresome," and to this kind the sentimental comedy belonged. Great, nevertheless, was the success of *False Delicacy*. It was played twenty nights in the season to crowded houses; the sale of it when printed was ten thousand copies; and the bookseller who purchased it, to evince his gratitude, gave the author a public breakfast and a piece of plate. The entire gains of Kelly amounted to more than seven hundred pounds.

The fame of the piece was not limited to England. It was translated into German, Portuguese, and French, and was played in Lisbon and Paris with marked applause. These continental honours were perplexing to Goldsmith. He denied at first that any translation had been made, and when the fact was demonstrated beyond dispute he gravely asserted that "it must be done for the purpose of exhibiting it at the booths of foreign fairs, for which it was well enough calculated." He vented his spleen at coffee-houses as well as among his friends, and vowed "he would write no more for the stage whilst the dramatic chair was occupied by such blockheads." In the midst of these pangs of envy he accidentally met Kelly, who was no stranger to the abuse he had lavished upon him, in the green-room of the Covent Garden Theatre, and congratulated him faintly on the success of his comedy. "I cannot thank you," said Kelly, "for I cannot believe you." They never spoke again, but, when Goldsmith was buried, Kelly of his own accord joined the funeral procession, and wept bitterly over the grave.¹

False Delicacy, like its author, has passed away, and the Good-natured Man survives. "It is the best comedy," said Johnson, "that has appeared since the Provoked Husband. There has not of late been any such character exhibited upon the stage as that of Croaker." It was with reason that Johnson was partial to Croaker, for Goldsmith acknowledged that he had borrowed the conception from the *Suspicious* of the *Rambler*.² Of the two other prominent personages, Honeywood was a repetition of the many portraits from himself, and we cannot but suspect that he also found the germ of Lofty in his own addiction to his unfounded boasting. The rest are agents to conduct the plot, and have little that is distinguishing. "To delineate character," he said in his preface, "had been his principal aim," and Mrs. Inchbald was of opinion

¹ [Forster's *Goldsmith*, vol. ii. pp. 93-6, 110, 111, 424.]

² [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 190; *The Rambler*, No. 59.]

that the design had been attended with conspicuous success. Croaker, Honeywood, and Lofty deserved, she said, the highest praise which could be bestowed upon the creations of the mind. "In fiction they are perfectly original, yet are seen every day in real life."¹ To us, on the contrary, they seem to want nature; a large alloy of the peculiarities of each is common enough in the world, but they never exist in solitary extravagance. Honeywood, Croaker, and Lofty are rather the personifications of qualities than men. The first is all childish benevolence, the second all groundless alarm, and the third a mere mouth-piece for ostentatious lies. The same objection, however, may be urged against several of the masterpieces of Molière. "To exaggerate the features of folly, to render it more thoroughly ridiculous," was the just principle of comic satire laid down by Goldsmith in his *Essay on Learning*.² His mistake is to have carried the principle too far, till comedy descends to the lower level of farce. The humour is excellent of its kind. Lofty is entertaining, and the apprehensions of Croaker are ludicrous in the extreme. The misunderstandings, though not always probable, are well contrived for producing mirth, and the piece must have had a triumphant run, if the insipid Honeywood had been replaced by a character of more sterling worth or more comic effect. As it is, he provokes less laughter than contempt, and is too complete an illustration of the proverb that "every man's friend is every man's fool," for the serious hero of a play.

Shuter selected the piece for his benefit, and the author, says Mr. Forster, "in a fit of extravagant good-nature sent him ten guineas for a box ticket."³ In this instance we think that the gratuity of Goldsmith was the discharge of a debt, for, by saving his comedy from being damned, Shuter had brought him fifty times the sum. On the first

¹ [Forster's *Goldsmith*, vol. ii. p. 18, note.]

² [Chap. x., Goldsmith's *Works*, vol. ii. p. 54.]

³ [Forster's *Goldsmith*, vol. ii. p. 103.]

night of the play he told the actor that he had exceeded his own idea of the character, and that the fine comic richness of the colouring made it appear almost as new to him as to the audience. The bulk of the proceeds from the *Good-natured Man* was spent in purchasing, and furnishing with elegance, a set of chambers in Brick Court, in the Temple, for which he gave four hundred pounds. Having emptied out his pockets the instant they were filled, he had still his daily bread to earn, and for this he trusted to a *History of Rome*, in two volumes, which he was compiling for Davies. It was commenced in 1767, and published in May, 1769. The price paid for the copyright was two hundred and fifty guineas. This was the work which Johnson very erroneously contended placed Goldsmith above Robertson as a writer of history. Goldsmith, he said, had put into his book as much as it would hold,—had told briefly, plainly, and agreeably, all that the reader wanted to know; while Robertson was fanciful, cumbrous, and diffuse. “Goldsmith’s abridgment,” he went on, “is better than that of Lucius Florus or Eutropius; and I will venture to say that if you compare him with Vertot in the same places of the *Roman History*, you will find that he excels Vertot. Sir, he has the art of compiling, and of saying everything he has to say in a pleasing manner.”¹ Though there is broad truth in the commendation of Johnson, it conveys an exaggerated notion of the merit of the book, which is not only destitute of exact scholarship, but bears in the style innumerable marks of the careless haste with which it was composed.

The credit he derived from his *English and Roman Histories*, coupled with his general fame, procured him, in December, 1769, the distinction of being nominated Professor of History in the newly created Royal Academy of Painting, at the same time that Johnson was appointed Professor of Ancient Literature. There was neither salary

¹ [Boswell’s *Johnson*, p. 258.]

nor duties attached to the office, and Goldsmith, in a stray letter to his brother Maurice, in the January following, says, "I took it rather as a compliment to the institution than any benefit to myself. Honours to one in my situation are something like ruffles to one who wants a shirt."¹ A less vain and simple man would have reversed the phrase and represented the appointment as a compliment from the institution to himself. To obtain the requisite shirt, he had entered into an engagement in February, 1769, with a bookseller, Mr. Griffin, to compile a *Natural History* in eight volumes, at the rate of a hundred guineas a volume, and in June, encouraged by the success of his *Rome*, he contracted with Davies to finish in two years a *History of England* in four volumes for five hundred pounds. He was to be paid for each volume of the *Natural History* as the manuscript was delivered; but he was to receive nothing on the *History of England* till the whole was complete. Before the year had run out he persuaded Griffin to advance him five hundred guineas on a work he had barely begun, and, having anticipated and squandered his supplies from this source, he devoted nearly all his time to the compilation for Davies, which would bring a return. He had never been very sensitive in pecuniary matters, and his obtuseness increased with his difficulties. The breach of his engagements produced expostulations from the booksellers, which roused more ire than repentance. In one altercation of the kind with Davies they agreed to refer the difference to Johnson; and Goldsmith "was enraged to find that one author should have so little feeling for another as to determine a dispute to his disadvantage in favour of a tradesman."²

Mr. Robert Day, then a law student at the Middle Temple, and afterwards an Irish judge, became acquainted with him in 1769, and often visited him in

¹ [Forster's *Goldsmith*, vol. ii. p. 170.]

² [Davies's *Life of Garrick*, vol. ii. p. 156.]

conjunction with another of his countrymen, the young and at that time unknown Henry Grattan. The habit of Goldsmith, according to this unexceptionable witness, was to lay aside his labours when his purse was replenished, and give himself up, while he had a sixpence left, to convivial enjoyments and attendance at the theatres, Ranelagh, and Vauxhall. His funds dissipated, he recommenced his drudgery, and paid for his brief excesses by protracted toil.¹ All are agreed—notwithstanding the Man in Black, Sir William Thornhill, and Honeywood—that much of his money continued to be bestowed upon artful impostors, or upon persons whose circumstances were not so bad as his own. Once, as Mr. Forster relates, when he had recently performed a piece of literary task work for the sake of two guineas, he made over seven and a half to a vagabond Frenchman as a subscription to a pretended History of England in fifteen volumes.² Two or three poor authors and several widows and housekeepers were his constant pensioners. “He was so humane in his disposition,” says Mr. Cooke, “that his last guinea was the general boundary of his munificence.”³ Nay, he carried it further still, for, when he had no money to bestow upon his regular dependants, he would give them clothes, and sometimes his food. “Now, let me only suppose,” he would say, with a smile of satisfaction, after sweeping the meal on his table into their laps, “that I have eaten a heartier breakfast than usual, and I am nothing out of pocket.”⁴

Observers remarked that his benevolence, real as it was, was stimulated by ostentation, and, from his imputing the motive to the characters which he drew from himself, he was evidently conscious of the weakness. The odd simplicity which pervaded his proceedings was especially

¹ [Forster's *Goldsmith*, vol. ii. p. 252.]

² [Forster's *Goldsmith*, vol. ii. p. 13, from *Percy Memoir*, p. 99.]

³ [*European Magazine*, vol. xxiv. p. 261; Forster's *Goldsmith*, vol. ii. p. 121.]

⁴ [*Ibid.*]

conspicuous in relation to money. He borrowed a guinea when he was destitute himself, to lend it to Mr. Cooke, and endeavoured in his absence to thrust it under his door. His friend, in thanking him, remarked that somebody else might have been first at the chambers, and picked it up. "In truth, my dear fellow," he replied, "I did not think of that."¹ Another acquaintance remonstrated with him for leaving money in an unlocked drawer, from which an occasional servant took what he pleased for the casual expenses of his master. "What, my dear friend," exclaimed Goldsmith, "do you take Dennis for a thief?"²

With all his recklessness of expenditure no man had a store of cheaper tastes, or was more easily entertained. His favourite festivity, his holiday of holidays, was to have three or four friends to breakfast with him at ten o'clock, to start at eleven for a walk through the fields to Highbury Barn, where they dined at an ordinary frequented by authors, Templars, and retired citizens, for tenpence a head, to return at six and drink tea at White Conduit House, and to end the evening with a supper at the Grecian or Temple Exchange Coffee-house. "The whole expense," says Mr. Cooke, "of the day's fête never exceeded a crown, and oftener from three-and-sixpence to four shillings, for which the party obtained good air, good living, and good conversation."³ He had got weary of the hopeless attempt to keep up his dignity, and was again willing to be happy in the secondary society where he was alone at his ease. He belonged to a club of good fellows at the Globe Tavern, called the Wednesday Club from its day of meeting, and where a principal part of the pleasure was to sing songs after supper. The sort of company he met there, and the terms on

¹ [Forster's *Goldsmith*, vol. ii. p. 13.]

² [*Ibid.*, vol. ii. p. 385.]

³ [*European Magazine*, vol. xxiv. p. 172 ; Forster's *Goldsmith*, vol. ii. p. 119]

which he stood with them, are amusingly exhibited in the fact that a pig-butcher was one of the members, and, piquing himself on his familiarity with the celebrated Goldsmith, always said in drinking to him, "Come, Noll, here's my service to you, old boy." Glover, an Irish adventurer, and who had been, in succession, physician, actor, and author, maliciously whispered to Noll, after one of these salutations, that he wondered he permitted such liberties from a pig-butcher. "Let him alone," said Goldsmith, "and you'll see how civilly I'll let him down." With this design he called out, at the first pause in the conversation, "Mr. B——, I have the honour of drinking your good health"; to which the pig-butcher answered briskly, "Thankee, thankee, Noll." "Well, where now," inquired Glover, "is the advantage of your reproof?" And the baffled Noll had nothing to reply, except that "he ought to have known before that there was no putting a pig in the right way."¹ Trivial as are these anecdotes, they are worth repeating because they throw light upon the character of the man, and explain why he was "the jest and riddle," as well as the "glory" of his friends.

His enjoyment in all societies where he could freely give way to his natural impulses was immense. "He was always cheerful and animated," says Mr. Day, "often indeed boisterous in his mirth."² He went to a dance at Macklin's, and was brought to such a pitch of ecstasy by this "frisking light in frolic measures" that he threw up his wig to the ceiling, exclaiming that "men were never so much like men as when they looked like boys." He prided himself on his dancing, which was not so graceful as it was hearty, and an Irish family of the name of Seguin, who were intimate with him at this period, were thrown into uncontrollable fits of laughter by seeing him go through a minuet. He loved to romp with children and join in their games. He would put the front of his

¹ [Forster's *Goldsmith*, vol. ii. p. 107, from *European Magazine*.]

² [Forster's *Goldsmith*, vol. ii. p. 251.]

wig behind to excite their merriment, play forfeits and blind man's buff, and show them tricks upon cards.¹ The younger Colman remembered that when he was five years old he had given Oliver a smart slap upon the face for taking him on his knee. The little vixen was locked up by his father in a dark room, whither Goldsmith soon followed with a candle, and wheedled Master Colman back to good humour by placing a shilling under each of three hats, and then conjuring them all under the same crown.² It was a gambol with his dog that suggested to him the pretty couplet in the Traveller—

By sports like these are all their cares beguiled,
The sports of children satisfy the child.

But from sports like these he was summoned back to his desk, and, in addition to the bulky compilations he had undertaken, he was preparing the *Deserted Village* for the press. Mr. Cooke calling upon him the day after it was commenced, Goldsmith read him a fragment of ten lines, adding, when he had done, "Come, let me tell you this is no bad morning's work."³ From the time he took to complete the poem he could rarely have accomplished so much at a sitting. His habit was first to set down his ideas in prose, and, when he had turned them carefully into rhyme, to continue retouching the lines with infinite pains to give point to the sentiment and polish to the verse. Mr. Forster dwells with great force upon the loss to literature from the want of this care in the generality of authors.⁴ The bulky ore, he truly says, can seldom obtain currency, however rich the vein. Those who extract and collect the gold, no matter how thinly it may have been originally spread, will ever be the writers most prized by the world. It was owing to this care that the *Deserted Village*, being published on the 26th of May, 1770, went through four editions before the end of June. His brother Henry died in 1768, and the honour which Goldsmith

¹ [Forster's *Goldsmith*, vol. ii. p. 107.]

² [*Ibid.*, p. 51.]

³ [*Ibid.*, p. 118.]

⁴ [*Ibid.*, p. 168.]

allotted him on the appearance of the Traveller he now conferred upon Sir Joshua Reynolds. "The only dedication I ever made," he gracefully says, "was to my brother, because I loved him better than most men. He is since dead. Permit me to inscribe this poem to you." Sir Joshua Reynolds returned the compliment by painting a picture of Resignation, in allusion to the line—

While Resignation gently slopes the way,

and inscribing the print which was engraved from it to Goldsmith. An anecdote was told of his having returned a part of the hundred pounds which Griffin had paid him for the copyright, in consequence of his having discovered that it amounted to "near *five shillings* a couplet, which was more than any bookseller could afford, or indeed more than any modern poetry was worth." Mr. Forster rejects the tale, on the ground that it was a very improbable act in a man who, a little before, had taken five hundred guineas from the same publisher on the faith of a book he had hardly begun.¹ Mr. Cooke, however, a trustworthy authority, and who was certainly in a situation to be privy to the transaction, says that the story was "strictly true,"—a phrase which implies both that it had been called in question and that he knew it to be a fact. Testimony so distinct must weigh, we think, against speculative improbabilities, which amount to very little in the case of Goldsmith, who was a creature of impulse, and who, in money matters especially, would meanly borrow one minute what he generously gave the next. The rapid sale of the poem, it is added, removed his scruples, and he ultimately accepted payment in full. Even at this price he was only remunerated in fame for the lengthened labour he had bestowed upon the work, and he replied to Lord Lisburne, who urged him at an Academy dinner to persevere in writing verse, "I cannot afford to court the muses; they would let me starve; but by my other labours

¹ [Forster's *Goldsmith*, vol. ii. p. 209.]

I can make shift to eat and drink, and have good clothes.”¹

“What true and pretty pastoral images has Goldsmith in his *Deserted Village*!” says Burke in a letter quoted by Mr. Forster. “They beat all: Pope and Phillips, and Spenser too, in my opinion—that is in the pastoral, for I go no further.”² In no other rural piece is there so much poetry and reality combined. The pictures of Auburn—its pastor, its schoolmaster, and all its other accessories—are as exact as anything in Crabbe, but they are painted under their best and softest aspect; and, while the Parish Register pains and depresses, Goldsmith throws a hue of enchantment, in the *Deserted Village*, over all he describes. The very titles of the poems are characteristic of their contents, and seem one to promise the prose, the other the poetry of life. The *Deserted Village* has the advantage over the *Traveller* of treating upon topics which lie closer to our doors, and touch our sympathies more nearly. The verse is a continuous succession of felicities without a single forced conceit. The vividness of the descriptive passages, the skill with which the details are selected, the magical language in which they are expressed, the pensive sweetness which pervades the piece, unite to make it one of the most perfect little poems in the world.

In the midst of the blaze of reputation which attended the publication of the *Deserted Village*, Goldsmith started, in July, 1770, for France, attended by Mrs. Horneck and her two pretty daughters—a Devonshire family, whose acquaintance he had made in the house of Reynolds. To travel had once been his supreme delight. The love for every place, except that in which they resided, is mentioned by himself as a Goldsmith characteristic. “But travelling at twenty and at forty are,” he said, “very different things. I set out with all my confirmed habits

¹ [Forster's *Goldsmith*, vol. ii. p. 209.]

² [Burke's *Correspondence*, vol. ii. p. 347.]

about me, and can find nothing on the continent so good as when I left it.”¹ Not meeting with the pleasure he anticipated, and his literary undertakings weighing upon his mind, he was glad to get back to his old quarters, after an absence of two months. He was no sooner home than he added to his already oppressive engagements by agreeing, for a payment of fifty guineas, to abridge his *Roman History*. A slight sketch of Parnell, which contained two or three graceful paragraphs, was published in the summer with some success ; and a *Life of Bolingbroke*, to be prefixed to his *Dissertation on Parties*, which it was calculated might obtain a fresh lease of popularity in the political heats of that fiery time, was now to be provided without delay. It was the first completed of his pending projects, and is one of the flimsiest tracts which ever proceeded from his pen,—flat and feeble in style, as well as destitute of thought and knowledge. In August, 1771, came forth the *History of England*, in four volumes, which has all the characteristics of his former compilations of the same kind. He avowedly took his information at second-hand, and only engaged to furnish what he more than accomplished—“a plain, unaffected narrative of facts, with just ornament enough to keep attention awake, and with reflection barely sufficient to set the reader upon thinking.”² He was accused, by men who were themselves overflowing with party spirit, of being the tool of the ministry, and of making history subservient to political passions. “I have been a good deal abused,” he remarked, writing to Langton, “for betraying the liberties of the people. God knows I had no thought for or against liberty in my head ; my whole aim being to make up a book of decent size, that, as Squire Richard says, would do harm to nobody. However, they set me down as an arrant Tory, and consequently an honest man. When you come to look at any part of it, you’ll say that I am a sour

¹ [To Reynolds, July 29, 1770 ; Forster’s *Goldsmith*, vol. ii. p. 219.]

² [Preface.]

Whig."¹ Goldsmith's political creed was of so extreme a kind that he was even opposed to the Hanoverian succession, and affirmed that it never would be well with our constitution until another "happy revolution" should rectify the injury done by the settlement of 1688.² He had once gone with Johnson to visit Westminster Abbey, and, while they were surveying Poets' Corner, his friend exclaimed,

"Forsitan et nostrum nomen miscebitur istis."

When they reached Temple Bar, Goldsmith pointed to the bony remains of the rebels' heads, and silyly whispered, in allusion to their mutual Jacobite predilections—

"Forsitan et nostrum nomen miscebitur ISTIS."³

But, notwithstanding his indulgence in these obsolete theories, his practical interest in passing politics, during the hottest ebullitions of factious rage, appears to have been extremely slight, and there were few subjects, we imagine, upon which he read, thought, or understood less. A year or two before, Dr. Scott, the chaplain of Lord Sandwich, endeavoured to engage him to devote his pen to the support of the administration, and informed him that he was empowered to pay him liberally for his services; but, poor as Goldsmith was, he was not to be tempted by the offer. "I can earn," he said, "as much as will supply my wants without writing for any party; the assistance you offer is therefore unnecessary to me."⁴

The fame of the Traveller brought Goldsmith into contact with his countryman, Mr. Nugent, who had now become Lord Clare. He was much with him at the close of 1770, at his seat of Gosfield Park, and in the spring of 1771 accompanied him to Bath. Oliver is said by Mr. Cooke to have been liable to fits of absence, and an instance occurred during the present visit, when he

¹ [Forster's *Goldsmith*, vol. ii. p. 283, from *Percy Memoir*.]

² [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 253.]

³ [*Ibid.*, p. 258.]

⁴ [Forster's *Goldsmith*, vol. ii. p. 71.]

strayed into the house of the Duke of Northumberland, who lived next door to Lord Clare, and threw himself down on the sofa just as the Duke and Duchess, who were acquainted with him, were sitting down to breakfast. Conjecturing that he had made a mistake, they endeavoured to put him at his ease and inquired the news of the day; but it was not until they invited him to join them at the table that he awoke from his reverie, and explained, with many apologies and much confusion, that he was unconscious of the intrusion.¹ After seeing, on his return to London, his *History of England* through the press, he hired a room in a farmhouse on the Edgware Road, and commenced *She Stoops to Conquer*. "I have been trying these three months," he wrote to Bennet Langton, September 7, 1771, "to do something to make people laugh. There have I been strolling about the hedges, studying jests with a most tragical countenance. The comedy is now finished, but when or how it will be acted, or whether it will be acted at all, are questions I cannot resolve."² He met with more difficulties, in his attempt to get it brought upon the stage, than he probably anticipated when these words were penned. He told his friends that, notwithstanding the partiality of the public for graver pieces, he would persevere in his former course, and, at the risk of being thought low, "would hunt after nature and humour in whatever walks of life they were most conspicuous." The cold reception of the *Good-natured Man* had nevertheless abated much of his confidence in the result, and he was easily discouraged. A friend to whom he told the plot in a chop-house shook his head, and expressed a fear that the audience would think it too broad and farcical for comedy. Goldsmith looked serious, and taking him by the hand after a pause, said in piteous tones, "I am much obliged to you, my dear friend, for the candour of your opinion,

¹ [Forster's *Goldsmith*, vol. ii. p. 227.]

² [*Ibid.*, p. 283.]

but it is all I can do ; for, alas ! I find that my genius, if ever I had any, has of late totally deserted me.”¹ The manager of Covent Garden Theatre shook his head, like this friend. He kept the author long without an answer, started objections to the conduct of the piece, and on a pressing appeal from Goldsmith, in January, 1773, to be relieved from suspense, coupled with an entreaty that the comedy might at least be allowed a hearing, in consideration of the large sum of money he had shortly to make up, he replied by sending back the manuscript, with several unwelcome criticisms endorsed upon the pages. Though he added an assurance that the play should be acted, Oliver was irritated, and applied to Garrick. He had no sooner taken the step than he revoked the request, at the advice of Dr. Johnson, who went to Colman, and in his own words “prevailed on him at last by much solicitation, nay a kind of force, to bring it on.”² The manager still believed that it would never reach a second representation, and refused to expend a shilling in decoration. Several of the performers mutinied, and threw up their parts. Other petty vexations followed, and, with the exception of a favourable opinion from Dr. Johnson and one or two more, everything conspired to frown upon the venture. There was some difficulty in finding a suitable title for the piece, and on Davies repeating that the great oracle had said, “We are all in labour for a name to *Goldy’s* play,” Oliver, in one of those capricious fits of assumption, which oddly intermingled with undignified familiarity, exclaimed, “I have often desired him not to call me Goldy.”³

On the evening of the first performance, March 15, 1773, a few of the principal literary friends of the author assembled at dinner ; but Goldsmith was too agitated to swallow a mouthful, and too nervous to accompany

¹ [Cooke’s *Memoirs of Foote*, vol. iii. p. 77.]

² [Boswell’s *Johnson*, p. 604.]

³ [*Ibid.*, p. 371.]

the party to the theatre. He was found sauntering in St. James's Park, by an acquaintance, who told him his presence might be necessary to make some alteration demanded by the temper of the audience, which induced him to go. Entering the stage-door as a faint hiss broke out at the improbability of Mrs. Hardcastle believing herself to be forty miles from home when she was within a few yards of her own house, he exclaimed with alarm, "What's that?" "Pshaw! Doctor," said Colman, who was standing behind the scenes, "don't be fearful of squibs, when we have been sitting almost these two hours upon a barrel of gunpowder." Goldsmith never forgave the speech.¹ In reality, the piece had not been in jeopardy for an instant, and from beginning to end all was mirth and applause. Johnson, who presided over the dinner, was present to justify his favourable verdict, and, as often as he broke forth into a roar of laughter, the rest of the house followed the lead and laughed in chorus. "I know of no comedy," he said, "for many years that has so much exhilarated an audience,—that has answered so much the great end of comedy, making an audience merry."² "The play," Goldsmith wrote himself to Mr. Cradock, "has met with a success much beyond your expectations or mine. I cannot help saying that I am very sick of the stage, and, though I believe I shall get three tolerable benefits, yet I shall on the whole be a loser even in a pecuniary light; my ease and comfort I certainly lost while it was in agitation."³ The comedy was repeated all the available nights, which amounted only to twelve, up to the end of the season, and if what Mr. Cooke says be true, that Goldsmith cleared eight hundred pounds, he could not have been the loser he anticipated through the time subtracted from his ordinary task-work. In the next season *She Stoops to*

¹ [Forster's *Goldsmith*, vol. ii. p. 342; from Cooke, *European Magazine*, vol. xxiv. p. 173.]

² [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 257.]

³ [Forster's *Goldsmith*, vol. ii. pp. 336, 337, from Cradock's *Memoirs*, vol. i. p. 226.]

Conquer continued a favourite, and Goldsmith grew in love with dramatic writing and the stage. Mr. Cooke believes that, had he lived, he would have increasingly devoted himself to this department of literature. The general approbation of the comedy was accompanied by a general abuse of Colman for his jealousy or want of judgment, and he was at last humbled to the point of asking Goldsmith to make some statement which should "take him off the rack of the newspapers."¹

No better description can be given of *She Stoops to Conquer* than that which was written by Johnson to Boswell, after reading it in manuscript. "The chief diversion arises from a stratagem by which a lover is made to mistake his future father-in-law's house for an inn. This, you see, borders upon farce. The dialogue is quick and gay, and the incidents are so prepared as not to seem improbable."² With a general resemblance of manner to his former comedy, there is this prominent distinction, that in the *Good-natured Man* he has concentrated his strength upon the humour which grows out of character, and in *She Stoops to Conquer* upon the mirth which is provoked by misadventures. Even Marlow, forward with his inferiors and bashful with his equals, seems a commonplace conception. The interest and comicality of the piece are in the succession of deceptions and misunderstandings, and the lively dialogue which accompanies them. As he indulged before in extravagance of character, so he did now in extravagance of incident, and nothing except his admirable management of his materials kept his piece within the limits of comedy. Horace Walpole pronounced it the "lowest of all possible farces."³ He might at least have said the highest, nor does it much matter by what name it is called, when it is allowed by everybody to be one of the most ingenious.

¹ [Johnson to Mrs. Thrale, March 25, 1773; Johnson's *Letters*, vol. i. p. 80.]

² [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 247.]

³ [To Mason, May 27, 1773; Walpole's *Letters*, vol. v. p. 467.]

original, and laughable plays in the language. The Good-natured Man is tame by comparison.

Every stage of Goldsmith's existence was coupled with some disaster or jest, and a few days after the appearance of *She Stoops to Conquer* he brought himself into a new description of trouble. A letter appeared in the *London Packet* abusing his comedy, and asserting that he had a hopeless admiration of Miss Horneck. He had the folly to call upon Evans, the publisher of the paper, and strike him with a cane at the moment when he was disclaiming his knowledge of the libel, and promised to speak to the editor. Evans returned the blow, a scuffle ensued, Goldsmith's hand was much bruised in the fray, a lamp above his head was broken to pieces and covered him with oil, and, to complete his humiliation, there issued at this instant from a back room his old detractor, Dr. Kenrick, the author of the attack, who led him away to a hackney coach. He was prosecuted by Evans for the assault, and compromised the action by paying fifty pounds to a Welsh charity. His friends laughed, the journals railed at him, and he wrote a letter in his defence, called by Johnson "a foolish thing well done,"¹ in which, avoiding all the details of the transaction, he confined himself to half a dozen well-turned sentences upon the licentiousness of the press. It was this time a comedy in which "he had stooped to be conquered."

Neither the eight hundred pounds, nor his other earnings, sufficed to satisfy his past debts and present extravagance. "When he exchanged his simple habits," says Mr. Cooke, "for those of the great, he contracted their follies without their fortunes or qualifications. Hence, when he ate or drank with them, he was habituated to extravagances which he could not afford; when he squandered his time with them, he squandered part of his income; and when he lost his money at play with them, he had not their talents to recover it at another oppor-

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 248.]

tunity.”¹ He had all his life been fond of cards, played ill, and, when the run of luck was against him, would fling his hand upon the floor, and exclaim, with mock concern, “Bye—fore George, I ought for ever to renounce thee, fickle, faithless Fortune!” But in his latter years he played for deeper stakes. He contracted what Cooke calls “a passion for gaming,” which is one of the ingredients in the motley character that was drawn of him by Garrick; and Mr. Cradock, who was on familiar terms with him at this period, specifies it as his greatest fault, that if he had thirty pounds in his pocket he would lose it all by an attempt to double it.² An abstemious man himself, he was ostentatious in his entertainments, and in the last year of his life Johnson and Reynolds rebuked his profusion by refusing to partake of the second course of a too sumptuous dinner.³ He often repented his folly, but as often renewed it. Reynolds found him one morning kicking a bundle round his room. The poet said, in explanation, that it was a masquerade suit, and, being too poor to have anything useless about him, he was taking out the value in exercise, or, in other words, he was venting his vexation for his thoughtless conduct upon the dress.⁴ His accumulating debts made him melancholy and wayward. He would frequently quit abruptly the social circle and creep to his own cheerless chamber to brood over his embarrassments. His happiest periods, as he acknowledged, were when, driven by sheer necessity from the round of dissipation, he retired into the country to labour with unremitting toil upon his projects.

In the intervals between his other engagements Goldsmith had for some time been continuing in his farmhouse retreat the *History of Animated Nature*. “It is about half finished,” he said to Langton in the letter of Sep-

¹ [*European Magazine*, vol. xxiv. p. 173.]

² [Forster's *Goldsmith*, vol. ii. pp. 256, 257.]

³ [*Ibid.*, p. 415, from Dr. Kippis.]

⁴ [*Ibid.*, p. 255.]

tember, 1771, "and I will shortly finish the rest. God knows, I am tired of this kind of finishing, which is but bungling work."¹ Boswell, in company with Mickle, the translator of the *Lusiad*, went to see him at his country lodging in April, 1772. He was not at home, but they entered his apartment, and found curious scraps of descriptions of animals scrawled upon the wall with a blacklead pencil.² Buffon was his principal storehouse for facts, and much of the work is an avowed translation from the eloquent Frenchman. "Goldsmith, sir," said Johnson, "will give us a very fine book on the subject, but, if he can distinguish a cow from a horse, that I believe may be the extent of his knowledge of Natural History."³ To observe for himself, and to recapitulate the observations of others, were such distinct operations, that, in spite of his want of a practical acquaintance with the science, he might easily be equal to a view of the popular parts of the study. He was a little credulous of marvels, and if his guides had gone astray, he of necessity copied their errors; but the volumes teem with delightful information, and of the literary merits of the narrative it is enough to say that it was written by Goldsmith.

The purchase-money of the *History of Animated Nature* was spent before it was earned. The work was not finished till Goldsmith was within a foot of the grave, nor published till after his death, and throughout the interval which elapsed from its commencement to its conclusion it continued to be one of his worst embarrassments. He had still to provide for the wants of the passing hour, and numerous were the schemes he attempted or proposed. He was in arrear to the younger Newbery, to whom he made over the copyright of *She Stoops to Conquer*, in partial satisfaction of a debt which

¹ [Forster's *Goldsmith*, vol. ii. p. 283.]

² [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 240.]

³ [*Ibid.*, p. 520, note.]

he had previously promised to discharge by another such tale as the *Vicar of Wakefield*. The specimen which he furnished proved to be a narrative version of the *Good-natured Man*, and was declined by the publisher. He undertook, as a companion to his *History of Rome*, to compile, for two hundred and fifty pounds, a *History of Greece*, which was unfinished when he died. But his favourite project was a *Popular Dictionary of Arts and Sciences*, to which Johnson, Burke, and Reynolds had promised to contribute, and the loss of the disquisitions of these famous men renders the abandonment of the work a subject for great regret, though in the aggregate it would probably have been a very imperfect performance. Goldsmith wrote the Introduction to the Dictionary, which was read in the manuscript by Mr. Cradock, who thought it excellent, and which may possibly be the same with the *Prospectus* he printed and circulated among his friends, but which has escaped the researches of his editors. Davies tells us that his expectations from any new scheme were generally sanguine, but for this he prognosticated an unusual success, and never recovered the disappointment of its rejection by the booksellers, who had little confidence in the prosperity of "an undertaking, the fate of which was to depend upon a man with whose indolence of temper and habits of procrastination they had long been acquainted."¹ In some emergency he borrowed forty pounds of Garrick, and not long afterwards he sent him a note, which bears manifest marks of having been written in agitation and distress, in which he requests him to make the debt a hundred. To propitiate his creditor he offered to remodel the *Good-natured Man*, in accordance with the original proposal of the manager when they quarrelled upon the subject. "I will give you a new character," Goldsmith said, "and knock out Lofty, which does not do, and will make such other alterations as you suggest." Garrick promised the money, but gave

¹ [Davies's *Life of Garrick*, vol. ii. p. 165.]

no encouragement to the scheme for recasting the play. The thanks of Goldsmith were warm, and to show his gratitude he added, "I shall have a comedy for you in a season or two, at furthest, that I believe will be worth your acceptance, for I fancy I will make it a fine thing." Both these notes are endorsed by Garrick, "Goldsmith's palaver";¹ and it is likely enough that his distresses enticed him into promises and professions which, though meant at the moment, were quickly forgotten.

In the midst of these shifts and sorrows a trivial incident occurred which produced one of the happiest effusions of Goldsmith's pen, and afforded a fresh proof of the versatility of his talents. He insisted one evening at the Literary Club on competing with Garrick in epigram, and each agreed to write the other's epitaph. The actor exclaimed on the instant that his was ready, and he produced extempore the couplet which is as widely known as the name of Goldsmith himself—

Here lies Nolly Goldsmith, for shortness called Noll;
Who wrote like an angel, but talked like poor Poll.

Abashed at the laugh which ensued, "poor Poll" was unable to produce a retort. The company pursued the idea which had been started, and either then or afterwards several of them wrote epitaphs upon their standing butt in a similar vein. Goldsmith in the interim was not idle. He was carefully preparing his *Retaliation* in silence; and, when he had advanced as far as the character of Reynolds, he showed it to Burke. He wished it to be a secret till it was finished; but having allowed copies to be taken, its existence became known to those who were the subjects of it, and he was obliged to read it at the Literary Club in its imperfect state. Garrick mentions that the skirmish on the part of all concerned was conceived and executed in perfect good temper; but we learn from Mr. Cooke that Goldsmith intended that the sting should be felt. From the time

¹ [Forster's *Goldsmith*, vol. ii. pp. 396-8.]

that his talent for satire was discovered he was treated with greater respect, and the oddities which had hitherto been a theme for endless jest were spoken of as not entirely destitute of humour. Oliver marked the change, felt his power, and told a friend that he kept the poem "as a rod in pickle upon any future occasion." The premature disclosure of his verses took away the stimulus which he derived from anticipating the effect they would produce upon his bantering friends, and seems to have prevented his proceeding any further in a composition which certainly cost him much thought and pains. As far as we can recollect, nothing of the kind had ever been struck out before. His little rhyming piece of pleasantry, *The Haunch of Venison*, which he sent to Lord Clare about 1771, is in the same easy strain of verse; but the peculiarity of *Retaliation* is in the happy mixture of gaiety and satire; in the air of smiling good humour with which he has told the most poignant truths; and the dexterity with which he has blended praise and blame. The characters are drawn with uncommon terseness and force, and with such felicity of language that many of the lines have become proverbial.

A few weeks after this game of epitaphs had been played out poor Goldsmith was in his grave. He was subject to strangury, produced or aggravated by fits of sedentary toil; and an attack of the disorder in March, 1774, passed into a nervous fever. On the 25th of the month he sent for an apothecary, and, in defiance of his remonstrance, persisted in taking James's powder. Yet, much as the medicine reduced his powers, the worst symptoms of the disorder abated, and it was apparent that the sleeplessness which remained was induced by some other cause. "Your pulse," said Doctor Turton, "is in much greater disorder than it should be from the degree of fever which you have. Is your mind at ease?" "No," said Goldsmith, "it is not."¹ He was paying, in

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 549.]

fact, with his life, the penalty of his improvidence. He expired, after an illness of ten days, on the 4th of April, 1774; and on the 9th, his remains, followed by a few coffee-house acquaintances, hastily gathered together, were laid in the burial-ground of the Temple. "He died," wrote Johnson, "of a fever, exasperated, as I believe, by the fear of distress. He had raised money and squandered it by every artifice of acquisition and folly of expense." "Sir Joshua is of opinion that he owed not less than two thousand pounds. Was ever poet so trusted before?" "But let not his faults be remembered. He was a very great man."¹ It was suggested that he should be buried in Westminster Abbey, with a pomp commensurate with his fame; and Judge Day conjectured that the proposal was abandoned in consequence of his debts; but Mr. Cooke expressly states that the reason why the scheme was given up was because the greater part of the eminent persons who were invited to hold the pall, and whose presence could alone have conferred importance on the proceeding, pleaded inability to attend. Yet two at least of the number had a real and deep regard for the man. Burke, when he heard of his death, burst into tears; and Reynolds, who had never been known to suspend the exercise of his calling for any distress, laid down his brush, and painted no more that day.²

Goldsmith was short and thick in stature, his face round and strongly pitted with small-pox, his forehead low, and his complexion pale. The general cast of his countenance, according to Boswell, was coarse and vulgar; and Miss Reynolds states that he had the appearance of a low mechanic. He was once relating, with great indignation, that a gentleman in a coffee-house had mistaken him for a tailor; and his resemblance to the brethren of the

¹ [Johnson to Boswell, July 4; to Langton, July 5, 1774; Boswell's *Johnson*, pp. 413, 414.]

² [Hazlitt's *Mr. Northcote's Conversations*, p. 339.]

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Author & Crokerell photo.

Oliver Goldsmith

*From a painting by a pupil of Sir Joshua Reynolds
in the National Portrait Gallery.*

needle was notoriously so strong that an irresistible titter went round the circle.¹ One morning, when Mr. Percival Stockdale was remarking to Davies the bookseller on this similarity of appearance, Goldsmith entered, and, with that curious infelicity which seemed always to attend upon him, said to Mr. Stockdale, who had recently published a translation of Tasso's *Aminta*, "I shall soon take measure of you."² His picture by Sir Joshua presents the face of a man unusually plain, yet Miss Reynolds mentions it as the crowning feat of her brother in portrait-painting that he had imparted dignity of expression without destroying the likeness. What that lady thought of him appears from her naming him for her toast, when she was asked to give the ugliest person she knew; and Mrs. Cholmondeley, with whom she had some little difference at the time, was so delighted with the selection that she shook hands with her across the table. "Thus the ancients," said Johnson, "in the making up of their quarrels, used to sacrifice a beast between them."³

His address, until he warmed into the good humour which was natural to him, strengthened the unfavourable impression produced by his appearance. "His deportment," says Boswell, "was that of a scholar awkwardly affecting the easy gentleman."⁴ "His manner," says Davies, "was uncouth, his language unpolished, and his elocution was continually interrupted by disagreeable hesitation."⁵ "He expressed himself," says his friend Mr. Cooke, "upon common subjects with a plainness bordering upon rusticity, and often in words very ill chosen." Some attempts have been made to prove that his talk was not unworthy of his fame; but the witnesses to the contrary are so numerous, and there is such a general agreement in their testimony, that it is idle to controvert it. Mr. Rogers asked Mr.

¹ [*Johnsoniana*, No. 329.]

² [*Memoirs of Percival Stockdale*, vol. ii. p. 137.]

³ [*Johnsoniana*, No. 329.]

⁴ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 140.]

⁵ [Davies's *Life of Garrick*, vol. ii. p. 149.]

Cooke what he really was in conversation, and Cook replied emphatically, "He was a fool. The right word never came to him. If you gave him back a shilling, he'd say, 'Why, it's as good a shilling as ever was *born*.' He was a fool, sir."¹ Dr. Beattie said that the silliness he exhibited was so great that it almost seemed affected; and Sir Joshua Reynolds, who had a peculiar regard for him, adopted the same improbable theory.² Chamie after talking with him, came away, saying, "Well, I do believe he wrote the Traveller himself, and let me tell you that is believing a great deal."³ Against Horace Walpole's smart saying, that he was an "inspired idiot," Mrs. Piozzi wrote in her old age, "Very true";⁴ and the point, we may add, of Garrick's epigram would have had no sort of force unless it had possessed a semblance of truth. Malone, on the other hand, says that he never could assent to Walpole's pointed sentence. "I always," he adds, "made battle against Boswell's representation of him, and often expressed to him my opinion that he rated Goldsmith much too low." It is easy to collect from the book of Boswell, who acknowledges that his folly had been greatly exaggerated,⁵ the real state of the case. Johnson, who did the amplest justice to his genius, remarked that he had no settled notions upon any subject that his ready knowledge was very slight; that he was eager to shine; and discoursed at random upon questions of which he was almost entirely ignorant.⁶ "If he were with two founders," said the Doctor, "he would fall

¹ [Forster's *Goldsmith*, vol. ii. p. 122.]

² [To Sir W. Forbes, July 10, 1788, Forbes's *Life of Beattie*, vol. ii. p. 220.]

³ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 140, note; Northcote's *Life of Reynolds*, vol. i. p. 328.]

⁴ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 580.]

⁵ [Forbes's *Life of Beattie*, vol. ii. p. 220; Davies's *Life of Garrick*, vol. ii. p. 151.]

⁶ [Forster's *Goldsmith*, vol. ii. pp. 81 and 122, notes.]

⁷ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 140.]

⁸ [*Ibid.*, pp. 241, 244, 250, 256, 257, 580.]

a-talking on the method of making cannon, though both of them would soon see that he did not know what metal a cannon is made of.”¹ To this want of fixed opinions and extensive information was added what Boswell calls “a hurry of ideas, producing a laughable confusion in the expressing them”;² and what Mr. Cooke terms “a strange, uncouth, deranged manner” of speaking.³ With his slender store of facts, his inability to arrange his thoughts on a sudden, his hasty rashness of assertion, his incoherent, provincial style of expression, it is manifest that he would do very slender justice to the better genius which he poured at leisure into his books. But a man of his talents must, in spite of the deficiency of tact and quickness, have often been visited with bright ideas; and Boswell relates that he was sometimes very happy in his wit combats with Johnson, and records the instances of it.⁴ From the specimens which have been preserved of his absurdities it appears that they often consisted in the ludicrous misapplication of a single phrase. The story of his remarking to Lord Shelburne, “I never could conceive the reason why they call you Malagrida, for Malagrida was a very good sort of man,” was, as Johnson justly remarked, little more than an error of emphasis. Horace Walpole, whose authority, however, is worth nothing on the question, exclaimed that the blunder was a picture of his whole life. Beauclerk called it, ironically, “a happy turn of expression, peculiar to himself”; and the daughter of his friend Lord Clare, who always spoke of him with the utmost affection, used to say “that it was *so* like him.”⁵ His delight at the pun which was made on the dish of yellow-looking peas at Sir Joshua’s table, when one of the company observed that they ought to be sent to Hammersmith, for “that was the

¹ [Boswell’s *Johnson*, p. 359.] ² [*Ibid.*, p. 140.]

³ [Cooke’s *Memoirs of Foote*, vol. iii. p. 77.]

⁴ [Boswell’s *Johnson*, pp. 256, 691.]

⁵ [Boswell’s *Johnson*, pp. 715, 643, note; Davies’s *Life of Garrick*, vol. ii. p. 151; Hardy’s *Life of Lord Charlemont*, p. 177.]

way to Turn'em Green"; his taking the earliest opportunity to repeat the jest as his own; his first exclaiming that "that was the way to *make* 'em green," and next, when he found his witticism fall pointless, that "that was the *road* to turn 'em green"; his starting up, disconcerted at the second failure, and quitting the dinner-table abruptly—all reads like a humorous invention to caricature his failings.¹ In confirmation of his disposition to retire when he was mortified, Hawkins states that he would leave a tavern if his jokes were not rewarded by a roar. Once in particular, having promised the company, if they would call for another bottle, that they should hear one of his *bons mots*, he proceeded to tell that, on hearing that Sheridan practised stage gestures in a room with ten mirrors, he replied that "then there were ten ugly fellows together." His anecdote was received in silence; and after inquiring, to no purpose, "Why nobody laughed?" he departed in anger.² "Rochester," says Mr. Forster, "observed of Shadwell, that if he had burnt all he wrote, and printed all he spoke, he would have had more wit and humour than any other poet; and measuring Goldsmith by Shadwell, we may rest perfectly satisfied with the relative accomplishments and deficiencies of each."³

Boswell asserts that he studiously copied Johnson's manner, on a smaller scale;⁴ and both Hawkins and Joseph Warton relate that he affected to use the great lexicographer's hard words in conversation.⁵ The consequent impression he left upon Warton was, that "he was of all solemn coxcombs the first; yet," he adds, "sensible." To be solemn was not natural to him; and it is evident that he often forgot to act his part, or deliberately laid it aside. This mimicry of Johnson,

¹ [Forster's *Goldsmith*, vol. ii. p. 181.]

² [Hawkins's *Life of Johnson*, p. 418.]

³ [Forster's *Life of Goldsmith*, vol. ii. p. 184, note.]

⁴ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 140.]

⁵ [Hawkins's *Life of Johnson*, p. 416; Wooll's *Memoirs of Warton*, p. 312.]

which reduced him to a comical miniature of the original, no doubt occasioned, as it renders more piquant, the insolence of Graham, who wrote the *Masque of Tele-machus*. When he had arrived at a point of conviviality to talk to one man and look at another, he said, "Doctor, I shall be happy to see you at Eton," where he was one of the masters. "I shall be glad to wait on you," said Goldsmith. "No," replied Graham, "'tis not you I mean, Dr. *Minor*; 'tis Dr. *Major* there." "Graham," said Oliver, describing him afterwards, "is a fellow to make one commit suicide."¹ Another circumstance which he used to mention with strong indignation was the conduct of Moser, the Swiss, at an Academy dinner, who cut short his conversation with a "Stay, stay, Tdoctor Shonson is going to say something."² On such occasions, Johnson tells us, he was as irascible as a hornet; was angry when he was detected in an absurdity; and miserably vexed when he was defeated in an argument.³ Of the little ebullitions of temper which arose from mortified vanity, Boswell has preserved a single instance. He was about to interpose an observation in a discussion which was going on, and his sentence was drowned by the loud voice of Johnson, who had not heard him speak. Dr. Minor, who was standing restless, in consequence of being excluded from the conversation, hesitating whether to go or to stay, threw down his hat in a passion, and, looking angrily at Dr. Major, ejaculated, "Take it!" Toplady beginning to say something, and Johnson making a sound, Goldsmith called out, "Sir, the gentleman has heard you patiently for an hour; pray allow us now to hear him." "Sir," rejoined Johnson, "I was not interrupting the gentleman. I was only giving him a signal of my attention. Sir, you are impertinent." When they met in the evening at the club, Johnson

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 294.]

² [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 264; *Johnsoniana*, No. 329.]

³ [Boswell's *Johnson*, pp. 256, 580.]

asked his pardon, and Goldsmith, who was as placable as he was hasty, placidly replied, "It must be much, sir, that I take ill from you."¹

Of his vanity he gave many ludicrous examples. "He would never," said Garrick, "allow a superior in any art, from writing poetry down to dancing a hornpipe."² "How well this postboy drives," said Johnson to Boswell. "Now, if Goldy were here, he'd say he could drive better." "If you were to meet him," said a journalist of the day, who was satirising his well-known infirmity, "and boast of your shoes being well blacked, the Doctor would look down at his own and reply, 'I think mine are still better done.'"³ In trying to show at Versailles how well he could jump over a piece of water, he tumbled into the midst of it;⁴ at the exhibition of puppets he warmly exclaimed, on their dexterously tossing a pike, "Pshaw! I can do it better myself";⁵ and he broke his shins the same evening, at the house of Mr. Burke, in the attempt to prove that he could surpass them in leaping over a stick.⁶ When some of the club were loud in their praise of a speech of Mr. Burke, Goldsmith maintained that oratory was a knack, and that he would undertake to do as well himself. Being dared to the trial, he mounted a chair and was unable to advance beyond one or two sentences. He was compelled to desist, but reiterated his assertion, and imputed his failure to his being "out of luck" at the moment.⁷ He possessed so little of the boasted knack, that when he attempted a speech at the Society of Arts he was obliged to sit down in confusion.⁸

His vanity was coupled with a babbling envy that was laughable, but not malignant. "Though the type," says

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, pp. 262, 263.]

² [Forster's *Goldsmith*, vol. ii. p. 325.]

³ [*Ibid.*, vol. ii. p. 325.]

⁴ [*Ibid.*, p. 220.]

⁵ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 140.]

⁶ [*Ibid.*]

⁷ [Forster's *Goldsmith*, vol. ii. p. 325, from Cooke.]

⁸ [*Ibid.*, vol. i. p. 288, from Kippis, *Biographia Britannica*.]

Cooke, "of his Good-natured Man in every other respect, yet, in point of authorship, and particularly in poetry, he could bear no rival near his throne. / This was so deeply rooted in his nature that nothing could cure it. Poverty had no terrors for him ; but the applauses paid a brother poet made him poor indeed." He could not bear, Dr. Beattie said, that so much admiration should be bestowed upon Shakespeare;¹ and though he had a true and hearty regard for Johnson, he exclaimed in a kind of agony, on hearing him vehemently applauded, "No more, I desire you ; you harrow up my soul."²

Genius is jealous : I have heard of some
Who, if unnoticed, grew perversely dumb ;
Nay, different talents would their envy raise :
Poets have sickened at a dancer's praise ;
And one, the happiest writer of his time,
Grew pale at hearing Reynolds all sublime ;
That Rutland's Duchess wore a heavenly smile—
"And I," said he, "neglected all the while !"³

Mr. Forster expresses his regret that Crabbe should have invented an illustration of Goldsmith's vanity opposed to all the known records of his intercourse with Reynolds,⁴ but the author of the *Tales*, who had lived with many of Oliver's associates, plainly meant to give real instances ; and, as we see from the case of Johnson, love for the man did not exclude jealousy of the panegyrics bestowed upon the genius. The work of Crabbe in which the lines occur was dedicated to the Duchess of Rutland, and the second example was doubtless derived from herself or her family. Another ludicrous manifestation of his jealousy occurred at an Academy dinner : when one of the company was uttering some witticisms which excited mirth, Goldsmith begged those who sat near him not to laugh, "for in truth he thought it would

¹ [Forbes's *Life of Beattie*, vol. ii. p. 220.]

² [Davies's *Life of Garrick*, vol. ii. p. 150.]

³ [Crabbe's *Tales*, Tale v.—*The Patron*.]

⁴ [Forster's *Goldsmith*, vol. ii. p. 177, note.]

make the man vain.”¹ He openly confessed that he was of an envious disposition; and Boswell maintained that he had no more of it than other people, but only talked of it more freely.² All are agreed that it never embittered his heart; that it entirely spent itself in occasional out-breaks; and that he was utterly incapable of a steady rancour, or of doing an action which could hurt any man living. He once proposed to muster a party to damn Home’s play, *The Fatal Discovery*, alleging for his reason “that such fellows ought not to be encouraged”; but this, says Davies, was “a transient thought, which, upon the least check, he would have immediately renounced, and as heartily joined to support the piece he had before devoted to destruction.”³ Such were the foibles which shaded the higher qualities of this whimsical being, and which must find the readier belief that most of those who record his eccentricities appear to have felt kindly towards him, and could certainly not have conspired to fasten upon him a fictitious character which was so little in keeping with his genius.

Washington Irving expresses his belief that, far from being displeased that his weaknesses should be remembered, he would be gratified to hear the reader shut the volume which contained his history with the ejaculation “POOR GOLDSMITH!”⁴ In our opinion nothing would be more distasteful to him. He had higher aspirations, a more heroic ambition. But what would have delighted him would have been to hear Johnson pronounce in oracular tones that “he deserved a place in Westminster Abbey, and every year he lived would have deserved it better”;⁵ to read in the epitaph which his great friend prepared for his monument, “that he was of a genius sublime, lively and versatile, that there was no species of

¹ [Davies’s *Life of Garrick*, vol. ii. p. 166, note.]

² [Boswell’s *Johnson*, p. 264.]

³ [Davies’s *Life of Garrick*, vol. ii. p. 166.]

⁴ [Irving’s *Life of Goldsmith*, Conclusion.]

⁵ [Boswell’s *Johnson*, p. 580.]

writing that he had left untried, and that he treated nothing which he did not adorn";¹ to find posterity confirming the sentence and ranking him as the worthy peer of the illustrious men whose fame he emulated, and whom he needlessly envied; to see that his works were among the most popular of British classics, that everything connected with him possessed an undying interest for mankind, and that all the minutest incidents of his career had engaged the anxious researches of numerous biographers. "Tread lightly on his ashes, ye men of genius, for he was your kinsman; weed his grave clean, ye men of goodness, for he was your brother."²

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 520.]

² [*Tristram Shandy*, book vi. chap. xxv.]



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BOSWELL
AND
DR. JOHNSON

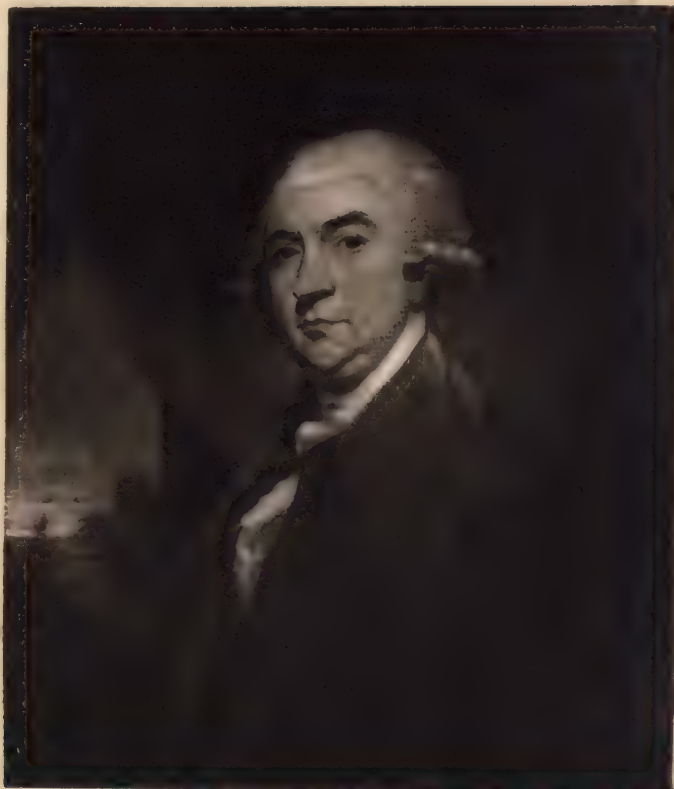
DR. JOHNSON was Whitwell Elwin's favourite literary character, and Boswell's Johnson his favourite book. Early in 1857, when he was looking out for some work which would divert his mind from domestic sorrow, he proposed "Boswell and Johnson" to Murray, as a subject for an article.¹ Soon after this he was on a visit to John Forster, in London, and the latter suggested to him that it would be useful to explain how such a "trivial creature" as Boswell seemed, had been able to bring out "the gravity and wisdom of Johnson" as he had done in his celebrated Life. Elwin did this in a paper, which appeared in the Quarterly Review of March, 1858, under the title of "Boswell—Early Life of Johnson." The literary part of Johnson's life was reserved for a sequel, called "Life and Writings of Johnson," published in January, 1859. This second article especially attracted attention,² and the praise it received induced Murray to express a wish to bring out the two essays in a separate form. Elwin took to the idea, but he did not work at it definitely till 1863, when he began a systematic revision, which amounted almost to rewriting the first article at considerably greater length. He then paused in his task, and did not resume it, so that the second paper was left with only some occasional additions. As, however, it was originally cast on a somewhat larger scheme than the first, this does not make any serious disproportion between the scale of the two, which are now printed together, in the shape in which he finally left them. As he did not intend to include the Boswell introduction, it is here detached from the rest. Only a few paragraphs in this are additional to the Quarterly version.

To his revised version Elwin appended copious references. The editions he used were Boswell's *Johnson*, with Croker's additions, 1 vol., 1860; the *Johnsoniana*, in the 1835 edition of Boswell; Johnson's *Works*, by Murphy, ed. 1801; Cunningham's edition of the *Lives of the Poets*, 1854. These editions have been adhered to in completing the references.

¹ *Memoir*, vol. i., p. 171.

² *Ibid.*, vol. i., p. 221.

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Sir Joshua Reynolds P^{ra} Ap^{re}

Walker & Cocherell p^{ra} sc

James Boswell
from a portrait in the possession of Philip Norman Esq^{re} F.S.A.



BOSWELL

THE contemporaries of Boswell had a higher opinion of his abilities than prevails at present. Lord Buchan said he "had genius, but wanted ballast to counteract his whim."¹ Dr. Johnson, in his *Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland*, bore testimony to his "acuteness, and gaiety of conversation."² Sir William Forbes acknowledged that "his talents were considerable,"³ and a writer, who was probably Isaac Reed, described him in the *European Magazine* "as a man of excellent natural parts, on which he had engrafted a great deal of knowledge."⁴ His social powers were universally recognised. "If general approbation," Johnson wrote to him in 1778, "will add anything to your enjoyment, I can tell you that I have heard you mentioned as a man whom everybody likes. I think life has little more to give."⁵ The next year Johnson writes to him, "the oftener you are seen, the more you will be liked";⁶ and, describing him to a lady, he said, "Boswell is a man who I believe never left a house without leaving wish for his return." David Hume speaks of him in a letter as being "very good-humoured, very agreeable, and

¹ [*Johnsoniana*, No. 638.]

² [Johnson's *Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland*; *Works*, vol. viii. 205.]

³ [Forbes's *Life of Beattie*, vol. ii. p. 167, note.]

⁴ [*Johnsoniana*, No. 675.]

⁵ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 619.]

⁶ [*Ibid.*, p. 640.]

very mad."¹ Burke doubted if he were fit to be a member of the Literary Club, but it was before they were acquainted, and when he was elected the great statesman was won over by an hilarity so abounding and spontaneous that he maintained it to be no more meritorious than to possess a good constitution.² To Boswell's other qualities for enlivening a circle was joined a talent for mimicry, which was then in fashion among the wits of the metropolis, most of whom employed it, as he tells in his *Life of Johnson*, to add piquancy to their anecdotes. In his boyhood he had imitated in the pit of Drury Lane Theatre the lowing of a cow with such success, that there was a general cry in the gallery, "*Encore the cow!*" He attempted to vary the performance with very inferior effect, and Dr. Hugh Blair, who sat next him, whispered in his ear, "My dear sir, I would confine myself to the cow!"³ His proficiency in the art increased with years, and in a trial of skill between himself and Garrick to see which could give the best personation of Johnson, he absolutely outdid the incomparable actor, who was famous for the faculty, in the conversational part, and was only surpassed by him in the inferior branch of taking off their friend's method of reciting verse. Hannah More was the umpire.⁴

¹ [Hume to Countess de Boufflers, Jan. 12, 1766; Hume's *Private Correspondence*, p. 131.]

² [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 288; *Johnsoniana*, No. 675.]

³ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 402. "Stick to the cow, mon," is the version of Dr. Blair's speech given by Sir Walter Scott. Boswell's own account is, "My reverend friend, anxious for my fame, with an air of the utmost gravity and earnestness, addressed me thus: 'My dear sir, I would confine myself to the cow.'" Boswell's "addressed me thus" is an announcement that he quoted the very words of Blair, and the point of this part of the story was in Blair's disproportionate "gravity and earnestness," on so trivial an occasion. Scott set down the version he had heard in conversation, but it was simple in him to think that he was correcting Boswell's authentic text by the substitution of a traditional report, which had been purposely corrupted, perhaps, under the notion of improving it, and which had anyhow been exposed to the adulterations that attend upon oral anecdotes, in their passage from mouth to mouth.—*MS. note to Boswell's Johnson*.]

⁴ [*Memoirs of Hannah More*, vol. i. p. 213.]

With the accuracy of distinction for which he was celebrated, Johnson has remarked that mimicry requires great powers, though it is to make a mean use of them,—“great acuteness of observation, great retention of what is observed, and great pliancy of organs to represent what is observed.”¹ It is not a little singular that a work which has conferred an immortality upon Boswell far beyond what the most indulgent of his applauding friends would have supposed him capable of attaining, should be the very ground with posterity for questioning his abilities. That a dunce should have produced a biography which, by general confession, stands at the head of its own department of literature—a department so difficult that it can boast fewer masterpieces than any other species of composition—is without a parallel, and hardly conceivable. Imbecility and absurdity could not of themselves give birth to excellence. To exaggerate Boswell’s weaknesses was perhaps impossible, but the talents which mingled with them have sometimes been denied or underrated, and a paradoxical antithesis has been set up between the folly of the man and the greatness of his book. His reasoning faculties were, no doubt, small; he was childishly vain, and often silly in his conduct; all of which may be equally affirmed of Lord Nelson, and yet did not prevent the coexistence of genius. The Life of Johnson is rendered in some degree more entertaining by the foibles of its author, but its plan and execution, everything which constitutes its enduring interest and value, are due to mind and skill, and not to the absence of these qualities.

Johnson asserted in 1773 that up to that period there had been no good biography of any literary man in England. “Besides,” he said, “the common incidents of life, it should tell us his studies, his mode of living, the means by which he attained to excellence, and his opinion of his own works.”² There were two things which he was confident he could do well—state what a book ought to

¹ [Boswell’s *Johnson*, p. 230.]

² [*Ibid.*, p. 346.]

be, and why it fell short of the conception. This must have been more particularly the case with biography, which was his favourite pursuit, and one upon which he had reflected much. Yet before he had uttered the observation which embodied his scheme, Boswell had framed a far superior plan, and his correspondence is evidence, if any evidence could be required, that his work was original by design, and not by chance. "I am absolutely certain," he writes to his friend Temple, "that my mode of biography, which gives not only a history of Johnson's visible progress through the world, and of his publications, but a view of his mind in his letters and conversations, is the most perfect that can be conceived, and will be more of a Life than any work that has ever yet appeared."¹ Several persons had reported the conversations of eminent writers, many had given collections of letters to the world, but nobody before Boswell had framed a distinct idea of combining them into a life-like portrait; of reproducing departed greatness upon paper; of depicting habits, talk, manners, disposition, and appearance, with the fulness and exactness of reality. Biography had been cultivated by the ancients as well as the moderns; and after hundreds had tried their hands upon it for centuries, it was no small intellectual distinction to be the first to perceive its true compass and capabilities. Neither was it a mere mechanical task to fill up the outline. Boswell was not very witty, nor very wise, but he had an exquisite appreciation of wit and wisdom. He avows again and again that he only recorded portions of what he heard, and the internal evidence would prove of itself, without his assertion, that he winnowed his matter. No wholesale and servile report could possess the vigour and raciness of his selections. In one or two instances others have retailed the same conversations as himself, at more than treble the length, and with not a tithe of the spirit. His tact is the more remarkable, that he carefully

¹ [Boswell's *Letters to Temple*, p. 265.]

treasured up trifles, when, to use his own words, "they were amusing and characteristic,"¹ and it is seldom in these cases that his judgment is at fault. Fitzherbert said that it was not every man who could carry a *bon mot*,² and probably no man carries witticisms correctly, who has not himself a full comprehension of their point. Boswell carried repartees, maxims, and arguments with accuracy, because he felt their force, and throughout his work details them in a manner which shows the keenness of his relish. To follow the hum of conversation with so much intelligence, and, amid the confused medley, to distinguish what was worthy to be preserved, required unusual quickness of apprehension, and cannot be reconciled to the notion that he was simply endowed with strength of memory. His sharp eye for manners and motives taught him in addition to preserve the dramatic vitality of his scenes. "The incidental observations," says Mr. Croker, "with which he explains or enlivens the dialogue, are terse, appropriate, and picturesque—we not merely hear his company, we see them."³

His perception, again, of character was acute. His portraits not only of Johnson, but of the society grouped around his central figure, are marked by the nicest lines of individuality. Goldsmith, Garrick, Beauclerk, and Dr. Taylor, are drawn with a vividness which could hardly be eclipsed, and, what is the perfection of the art, the result is produced by half a dozen easy strokes. He possessed the rare faculty of being able to single out the precise traits which were peculiar to each person, and whoever tries to imitate him will learn to respect the felicitous touches of his discriminating pen. "Few people," said Johnson, "who have lived with a man know what to remark about him." The chaplain of Bishop Pearce, whom I was to assist in writing some memoirs of his lordship, could tell me scarcely anything.⁴ He

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 3.]

² [*Ibid.*, p. 447.]

³ [Preface to Boswell's *Johnson*, p. xvii.]

⁴ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 483.]

wanted in his early days of authorship to give a Life of Dryden, and applied for materials to Swinney and Colley Cibber, the only two persons then alive who had seen him. Swinney had nothing to relate of so famous a personage, except that at Will's coffee-house he had a chair by the fire in winter, when it was called his winter chair, and that it was set in the balcony in summer, when it was called his summer chair. Cibber asserted that he was as well acquainted with him as if he had been his own brother, and could tell a thousand anecdotes of him, but his reminiscences were summed up in the barren announcement "that he recollected him a decent old man, arbiter of critical disputes at Will's." In the latter case Johnson thought that the poverty of the information was partly explained by the little intimacy which Dryden was likely to have permitted to Cibber, in spite of his boasted familiarity. "He had perhaps one leg only in the room, and durst not draw in the other."¹ Derrick was sent to Dryden's relations with no better result. "I believe," said Johnson, "he got all that I should have got myself, but it was nothing."² In the Rambler he states that there are not many who can describe a living acquaintance except by his grosser peculiarities.³ Swinney, Cibber, and his own relations could not describe the great poet at all. Notwithstanding the immense advantage of having the masterly model of Boswell to work by, the Lives which have appeared since his time have not tended to weaken the opinion expressed by Johnson of the extreme difficulty of the art of biographical portraiture. With rare exceptions the authors have neither known what to tell, nor what to leave untold.

The value of Boswell's graphic narrative is vastly increased by the minute fidelity of the representation. Sir Joshua Reynolds observed of the veracious Johnson, that, admirable as he was in sketching characters, he

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 516; *Johnsoniana*, No. 635.]

² [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 346.]

³ [*The Rambler*, No. 60.]

obtained distinctness at the expense of perfect accuracy, and assigned to people more than they really had, whether of good or bad¹; but to Boswell's book the great painter gave the remarkable testimony, that every word of it might be depended upon as if delivered upon oath.² Though many persons, when it appeared, were displeased with the way in which they themselves were exhibited, no one accused him of serious misrepresentation, or of sacrificing truth to effect. He never heightened a scene, exaggerated a feature, improved a story, or polished a conversation. His veneration for his hero could not entice him into smoothing down his asperities. Hannah More begged that he might be drawn less rudely than life. "I will not cut off his claws," Boswell roughly replied, "nor make a tiger a cat, to please anybody."³

When it was asserted in Johnson's presence that the "life of a mere literary man could not be very entertaining," Johnson replied, "that this was a remark which had been made and repeated without justice."⁴ He had previously written a paper in the *Idler*, to disprove the opinion by argument, and had since done much in his *Lives of the Poets* to disprove it by example. He affirmed in conversation that no mode of existence had more interesting variety, and in his essay he pointed out that, besides partaking of the common condition of humanity, a writer was exposed to many vicissitudes which were peculiar to his craft. He argued that the life of a literary man might be very entertaining as a *literary* life, and that, as the "gradations of a general's career were from battle to battle, those of an author's were from book to book."⁵ Boswell has added to his other distinctions that he has even gone beyond the position of his hero, and has demonstrated that the history of a literary man may not

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 608.]

² [Croker's Preface to Boswell's *Johnson*, p. xvii., note.]

³ [*Memoirs of Hannah More*, vol. i. p. 403.]

⁴ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 686.]

⁵ [*The Idler*, No. 102.]

only be as entertaining as any other, but may be "without exception the most entertaining book ever read."¹ This is his own judgment of his *Life of Johnson*, and posterity has confirmed the verdict. The wit, the wisdom, the anecdote, the talk of famous men and the talk about them, the strangeness and vivacity of the incidents, the singularity and eminence of the characters, the whole of a grand scene in a great period, revealed, as it were, both to the eye and ear, combine to render his book the most fascinating and instructive that ever issued from the press.

The contradictory elements of which Boswell's character was compounded come out more strongly if possible in his private correspondence than in the works he gave to the world. The pride of ancient blood, he said in his *Tour to the Hebrides*, was his predominant passion,² and he tells Temple that his grand object in life is the family of Auchinleck.³ (The importance he attached to his station was no doubt extravagant, and often broke out in a childish fashion, as, when some spurious lines by "*Mr. Boswell*" appeared in an obscure paper called the *Oracle*, he went to the editor and got him to promise to mention "handsomely" that they were not by "*James Boswell, Esq.*"⁴ But his respect for the aristocracy of rank was swallowed up in his veneration for the aristocracy of genius. "I have the happiness," he wrote to Lord Chatham, "of being capable to contemplate with supreme delight those distinguished spirits by which God is sometimes pleased to honour humanity."⁵ To these he attached himself with a fervour which no ridicule could abate, and he is immortal through his devotion to the plebeian Johnson, who declared, "I have great merit in being zealous for the honours of birth, for I can hardly

¹ [Boswell's *Letters*, p. 320.]

² [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 279.]

³ [Boswell's *Letters*, p. 81.]

⁴ [Boswell to Malone, March 8th, 1791; Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 829.]

⁵ [Boswell's *Letters*, p. 83.]

tell who was my grandfather." The narrow-minded old judge, who really believed that a knowledge of the technicalities of law was a higher acquisition than any literary attainment, and that to be Laird of Auchinleck was a loftier distinction than to be a Johnson or a Burke, upbraided his son for "going over Scotland with a *brute*." The son who, in spite of his own assertion, had a far more predominant passion than pride of blood, exclaimed, when relating the circumstance, "Think how shockingly erroneous!"¹ He had equal enthusiasm for General Paoli; and when he brought both his idols together, and acted as interpreter between them, he happily compared himself to an isthmus connecting two great continents.² He did not, however, in his zeal for Corsica and its hero, commit the often-quoted absurdity of parading himself at the Stratford Jubilee with the label "Corsica Boswell" on his hat. Davies, who is the sole authority for the assertion, withdrew it when better informed, and substituted a version which agrees with that which was given at the time in the *London Magazine*.³ The struggles of Corsica for independence had roused popular sympathy in England. Boswell's account of the island and people had been recently published, and generally applauded; and in the midst of the attention which he himself had largely contributed to attract to the cause, he went to the Stratford *masquerade*, where everybody appeared in a fancy dress, habited as a Corsican chief. The true inscription embroidered upon his cap was *Viva la Liberta*, which referred to the character he personated. In this there was nothing preposterous, nor was it considered in the least inappropriate by his brother masqueraders. He was guilty, however, of the folly of putting on the Corsican costume when he called on Mr. Pitt to present a letter

¹ [Boswell's *Letters*, p. 207.]

² [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 202.]

³ [*London Magazine*, September, 1769, quoted in Boswell's *Letters*, p. 135; Davies's *Life of Garrick*, 1st. ed., vol. ii. p. 212; corrected in 3rd. ed., vol. ii. p. 221.]

from Paoli. The great commoner, said Lord Buchan, who was present, "smiled, but received him very graciously in his pompous manner."¹ A little later he wrote to the stately minister, now become Lord Chatham, and told him that he could labour hard, that he felt himself coming forward, and that he hoped to be useful to his country adding, "Could your Lordship find time to honour me now and then with a letter?"² His friend Malone mentions among his qualities that he was an excellent judge of human nature, but, as frequently happens, self-conceit and self-interest would not permit him to apply to his own conduct the penetration which he displayed in his observation of others. He told Johnson that his father contrived to amuse himself with "very small matters." "I have tried this," he went on, "but it would not do with *me*." JOHNSON (laughing)—"No, sir: it must be born with a man to be contented to take up with little things."³ What Boswell supposed Johnson to have laughed at is impossible to be conjectured, but the same importance which led him to fancy that his vanities and frivolities were the reverse of little would not allow him to perceive that the laugh was at *him*.

The ardour of Boswell's admiration for the products of intellect was sometimes displayed in curious ways. In a fit of melancholy he was distressed to think that in a new state of being the poetry of Shakespeare would not exist. A lady relieved him by saying, "The first thing you will meet with in the other world will be an elegant copy of Shakespeare's works presented to you." He repeated this to Johnson, and relates that the sage smiled benignantly, and did not appear to disapprove of the notion.⁴ In the case of any other person Boswell, as in the former instance, would have given a truer interpretation to a smile which was elicited by the gross absurdity of the supposition. Mr. Croker put the circumstance into his index

¹ [*Buchan MSS., Johnsoniana*, No. 638.]

² [Boswell's *Letters*, p. 83.]

³ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 577.]

⁴ [*Ibid.*, p. 601.]

under the head of "Worldly-mindedness, singular instance of," and it may be questioned whether a second person ever existed who was tormented by the idea that no felicity could be perfect without a Shakespeare, or who would instantly have admitted into his religious creed the suggestion that he would meet with an "*elegant copy*" beyond the grave. Impious men may have talked such language in profane levity; Boswell alone could have adopted it in solemn seriousness.

In his determination to obtain the acquaintance of eminent persons he was often led to be forward and intrusive. He talked of going to Sweden with Johnson, and expressed a pleasure in the prospect of seeing the King. "I doubt, sir," said Johnson, "if he would speak to us." "I am sure," subjoined Colonel Macleod, "Mr. Boswell would speak to *him*." This leads Boswell to offer "a short defence of his propensity," which "he hoped did not deserve so hard a name as impudence," which "had procured him much happiness," and which he thought must be excusable if it was praiseworthy to seek knowledge in defiance of any other description of difficulty.¹ But there is the obvious difference that the laborious student involves no one except himself. His book cannot be disgusted by his advances, or mortify him by repulsing them. The strange mixture of jarring qualities is here again apparent. However Boswell might lower himself by forcing his way into company where he was unwelcome, the homage he showed to genius was rarely debased by any tincture of sycophancy. His worship of Johnson could not win him to acquiesce in many of the favourite opinions of his oracle. He differed stoutly upon the question of American Taxation, and his more catholic tastes would not permit him to be unjust to the novels of Fielding, the poetry of Gray, and the acting of Garrick. His was the independent, honest admiration of what was truly admirable. He simply paid to the

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 337.]

living author the respect which posterity admits to be due to the name, works, and conversation of Johnson. As he said himself, "It is a noble attachment, for the attractions are genius, learning, and piety." Even the sarcasm and vehemence of the master, before which most people quailed, could not awe the pupil into a seeming compliance. Notwithstanding that in his argumentative contests with his friend he was little better than an untrained stripling in the hands of a brawny and dexterous prize-fighter, he continued as long as he was able to return blow for blow, was always ready to re-enter the ring where he had so often been mauled, and, in spite of ingenious sophistry and witty repartee, occasionally gained an advantage over his formidable opponent.

If Boswell's traditional respect for hereditary rank was overborne by his intenser admiration for self-raised genius, his abstract notions of dignity were equally contradicted by his native sociality of disposition. He calls himself, to Temple, "the proud Boswell,"¹ and talks of his "Spanish stateliness of manner."² One of his resolutions of amendment when the publication of his *Account of Corsica* should have given him a character to support was "to be grave and reserved."³ But nature was stronger than artifice. "You are a philosopher," said Mr. Edwards, an old fellow-collegian, to Dr. Johnson; "I have tried, too, in my time, to be a philosopher, but I don't know how, cheerfulness was always breaking in." Boswell relates that Burke, Reynolds, and all the eminent persons to whom he repeated this remark, thought it an exquisite trait of character that simple Mr. Edwards should so ludicrously mistake the nature of philosophy, and should labour in vain to get rid of a blessing and set up melancholy in its stead.⁴ Yet the biographer who joined in the smile did the same thing when he fruitlessly endeavoured to supplant geniality by haughtiness, a virtue

¹ [Boswell's *Letters*, p. 118.]

² [*Ibid.*, p. 102.]

³ [*Ibid.*, p. 122.]

⁴ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 599.]

by a vice, and in spite of his efforts to be distant and self-important, good-humour and good-fellowship were "always breaking in." He would have learnt to value his native disposition if the conclusive observation of Baxter had ever occurred to his mind, that, howsoever proud a man may be himself, he always loves humility in others. Vanity, indeed, Boswell retained in abundance, but it was familiar and not stately, intrusive and not reserved, inviting liberties rather than repelling advances. He shared for a short time a set of chambers in London with a younger brother of his friend Temple, a half-pay lieutenant. He lamented to the elder Temple that he had unluckily allowed his fellow-lodger to be too free with him, and owned he was hurt to be upon an equality with the military stripling.¹ His own age was but twenty-three. He soon apparently abandoned a struggle in which he was always defeated. "He was generally liked," Lord Stowell told Mr. Croker, "as a good-natured, jolly fellow"; but to the inquiry, "Was he respected?" Lord Stowell replied, "Why, I think he had about that proportion of respect you might guess would be shown to a jolly fellow."² Stiffness would have been torture to a man of his animal spirits and convivial temperament. His reason for liking the society of players and soldiers was because they surpassed all others "in animation and relish of existence."³ "His eye" is said, by the writer in the *European Magazine*, "to have glistened, and his countenance to have lighted up, when he saw the human face divine."⁴ This social propensity, which broke in an instant through the chilling reserve habitual to Englishmen, put strangers immediately at ease with him. "No man," he tells Temple, "has been more successful in making acquaintances than I have been; I even bring people on quickly to a degree of cordiality."⁵ But, with

¹ [Boswell's *Letters*, p. 26.]

² [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 280, note.]

³ [Boswell's *Letters*, p. 247.]

⁴ [*Johnsoniana*, No. 675.]

⁵ [Boswell's *Letters*, p. 180.]

his usual *naïveté*, he mistook the cause of his success, and instead of perceiving that his own frankness and cordiality kindled heartiness in others, he seemed to fancy that it sprung up spontaneously towards himself from some indefinable fascination of appearance. After relating that in a journey to Scotland an agreeable young widow in the coach nursed his lame foot on her knee, he triumphantly subjoins, "Am I not fortunate in having something about me that interests most people at first sight in my favour?"¹ His chief defect as a companion was, as he acknowledges, that he talked at random, and in the exuberance of his spirits sometimes talked too much.² "Boswell shall talk to you," was one of the inflictions with which Beauclerk playfully threatened Lord Charlemont.³

For the principles of mankind to be better than their practice is far too frequent an inconsistency to be particularly characteristic; but even this common contradiction becomes noticeable in Boswell from the excess to which he carried it. "In his opinions he was religious and moral, in his conduct a libertine and a drunkard." In acknowledging to Temple, at the age of twenty-six, some of his licentious proceedings, he adds, "You may depend upon it that very soon my follies will be at an end, and I shall turn out an admirable member of society."⁴ A little later, and he fixes a period when what he calls "his perfection" is to commence.⁵ The period arrives, and he confesses that "he has been as wild as ever," but declares that, "if there is any firmness at all in him, he will never again behave in a manner so unworthy the friend of Paoli."⁶ This protestation was succeeded by more relapses, and more futile promises of perfection. His appetites to the last continued to get the better of his virtue.

¹ [Boswell's *Letters*, p. 240.]

² [*Ibid.*, p. 122.]

³ [Hardy's *Life of Lord Charlemont*, p. 178.]

⁴ [Boswell's *Letters*, p. 80.]

⁵ [*Ibid.*, p. 122.]

⁶ [Boswell's *Letters*, pp. 146, 147.]

His love of wine increased with years, and he died prematurely at the age of fifty-five from the effects of dissipation. Besides his general turn for conviviality, he had recourse to the bottle to drive away care; for, like most joyous men, he was liable to corresponding periods of depression. One of his latest dreads was lest he should be carried off in a fit of intoxication.¹ In the midst of these excesses he never ceased to bewail his offences, and to acknowledge how much they degraded him.)

While he was a student at Glasgow, in the winter of 1759, he attended some Roman Catholic services, and was so impressed by them that he turned Romanist, and wished to be educated for the Roman Catholic priesthood. His father, to divert him from the design, agreed to let him enter the army, and accompanied him to London, in March, 1760, for the purpose of procuring him a commission.² They called upon the Duke of Argyle to solicit his aid, and when he had conversed a little with young Boswell, he took his father aside, and said, "My lord, I like your son. That boy must not be shot at for three-and-sixpence a day."³ The Duke's complimentary evasion of the request put an end for the time to the military scheme, and Boswell was left for a twelvemonth to amuse himself in London. He plunged into dissipation, and exchanged Romanism for infidelity. He told Johnson, in 1763, that he had "come to a better way of thinking, and was fully satisfied of the truth of the Christian revelation, though he was not clear as to every point considered to be orthodox."⁴ Shortly after this conversation he wrote to Sir David Dalrymple, August 2, 1763: "My scepticism was not owing to thinking wrong, but to not thinking at all,"⁵ which he borrowed from Johnson's account of his

¹ [Boswell's *Letters*, p. 347.]

² [Rogers's *Memoir of Boswell*, p. 12.]

³ [*Boswelliana*, p. 229.]

⁴ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 137.]

⁵ [Rogers's *Memoir of Boswell*, p. 39.]

own "temporary neglect of religion," that "it was not the result of argument, but mere absence of thought."¹ Boswell's reverence for religion is frequently manifested in his *Life of Johnson*, and his letters to Temple contain an instance of his respect for it which would hardly have been looked for in a person so lax in his habits. A Mr. Nicholls, who from various circumstances appears to have been the person known as the friend of the poet Gray, related, at Boswell's house, that when he presented himself for ordination to Archbishop Drummond, and was asked what divinity he had read, he answered, "None at all"; that the archbishop replied he would send him to a clergyman who would examine him "*properly*," implying that his examination would be a farce; that the clergyman set him to write upon the necessity of a Mediator, and that, hardly understanding what was meant, he scribbled "some strange stuff as fast as he would do a card to a lady." He repeated the incident with profane levity, avowing himself to be perfidious to the archbishop if the story was true, and a calumniator if, as Boswell believed, it was false—

And if he lies not must at least betray.

In either case he was a traitor to the flock whom he professed to guide, a hypocrite, and a cheat. The man whose life is a standing fraud upon the most important of all subjects can never be believed upon any. A second infidel was present at the conversation, and Boswell confined himself to looking rebuke, because, he said, "if I had argued upon the impropriety of the story, the matter would have been made worse, while they were two to one." But he declared he would never again admit Nicholls into his house, and twice called upon him to remonstrate without being able to meet with him till he was stepping into his chaise to go southwards. "Perhaps," he adds, "it was as well that I did not see him. You know I speak pretty strongly."² Boswell to be sure kept company with David

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 137.]

² [Boswell's *Letters*, p. 257.]

Hume, telling him, however, that he was not clear that it was right, and excusing himself upon the ground that his infidel friend was much better than his books.¹ The historian, at any rate, was not guilty of shocking the ears of his believing associates with impieties which proved the dishonesty of the man, without any reference to the credibility of the faith of the Christian.

The errors, foibles, and inconsistencies of Boswell appear doubly glaring from his habit of blazoning them. He one day mentioned to Johnson that he was "occasionally troubled with a fit of narrowness." "Why, sir," replied Johnson, "so am I. *But I do not tell it.*" This Boswell relates to illustrate his assertion that the extraordinary liberality of his hero was combined with "a propensity to paltry saving," instead of perceiving that it was meant to rebuke his own inconsiderate loquacity.² As Swift says, some grains of folly are part of the composition of human nature, only the choice is left us whether we please to wear them embossed or inlaid, and it was Boswell's choice to wear his embossed. He extenuated Goldsmith's envy by the plea that he frankly owned it upon all occasions. Johnson maintained that it was an aggravation of the charge; "for what," he said, "a man avows he is not ashamed to think."³ This, which is true of most people, is only a partial explanation of the singular candour of Boswell, who related the things which he acknowledged to be to his discredit with unparalleled openness. But Johnson's assertion is to a great extent applicable to the ostentatious conceit of his biographer, who was far too

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 272.]

² [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 721.] Among the miscellaneous observations of Johnson which Boswell has preserved there is one which was evidently directed against the biographer in person. "A man should be careful never to tell tales of himself to his own disadvantage. People may be amused and laugh at the time; but they will be remembered and brought out against him upon some subsequent occasion." [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 493.] The Duke of Wellington used to say that no one was ever the better for advice. Boswell assuredly was not an exception to the rule.

³ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 586.]

vain to blush at the ebullitions of his vanity. He plainly thought that "pride should be its own glass, its own trumpet, its own chronicle," and he would never have assented to the remainder of Agamemnon's reflection, that "whatever praises itself but in the deed devours the deed in the praise." His confident creed upon this point could alone have induced him to publish the reprimand he received from Johnson "for applauding himself too frequently in company." "You put me in mind of a man who was standing in the kitchen of an inn with his back to the fire, and thus accosted the person next him, 'Do you know, sir, who I am?' 'No, sir,' said the other, 'I have not that advantage.' 'Sir,' said he, 'I am the *great* Twalmley, who invented the New Floodgate Iron.'" Not in the least abashed by the comparison, Boswell is careful to add to the ridicule by explaining in a note that "what the great Twalmley was so proud of having invented was a species of box-iron for smoothing linen."¹ In the entertaining extracts from one of his manuscripts, which Mr. Milnes edited for the Philobiblon Society, we find him recording that his friend Temple interrupted his boastful talk with the retort, "We have heard of many kinds of hobby-horses, but, Boswell, you ride upon yourself."² The poignancy of the truth was even with him a temptation to preserve it. His love of a good saying made him treasure it up, although directed against himself. As he exposed, in the works he published, the thrusts he had received from Johnson as carefully as Antony exhibited the stabs in the mantle of Cæsar, so he perpetuates in his notebook the wounds inflicted by inferior hands. He tells that he once complained of dullness in the presence of Lord Kames, who replied, "Yes, yes; Homer sometimes nods"; and upon his childishly construing the remark into a serious compliment, and being elated by the comparison, the old judge, to sober him, added,

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 721.]

² [*Boswelliana*, ed. Rogers, p. 208.]

"Indeed, sir, it is the only chance you have of resembling Homer."¹

What he conceived to be the felicity of the image must have been his motive for setting down, undeterred by the rebuke of Temple, a vainglorious speech, when expressing his regret that the King had not promoted him. "I am already the statue; it is only the pedestal that is wanting." But he did not need the provocation of a pointed sentence to entice him into proclaiming his own merits. He imputes it to "some unhappy turn in the disposition" of his father—"a man," he says, "of sense and worth"—that he was dissatisfied with his heir; and asks Temple if *he* would not feel a glow of parental joy in the possession of such a son?²—Temple, to whom he was for ever confessing vices and weaknesses of the most debasing kind. At the mature age of fifty he had still the assurance to write to his friend—"It is utter folly in Pitt not to reward and attach to his administration a man of my popular and pleasing talents."³ Yet, however much he may have overrated himself in the aggregate, it is surprising how justly he judged his qualities in detail. When he warns Temple, on one occasion, against indulging in ambition, by reminding him that they had once expected to be the greatest men of their age, and exclaims, on another occasion, "how inconsiderable we are in comparison with what we hoped we should be," he assigns their failure to its true cause, their "want of solidity and force of understanding."⁴ He exhorts the same friend to give over puzzling himself with political speculations, as being above his compass; for "neither of us," he says, "is fit for that sort of mental labour."⁵ In repeating Johnson's compliment to him, "that he did not talk from books," he adds that he was "afraid that he had not read books enough to be able to talk from them."⁶ He dined at the Fellows' table

¹ [*Boswelliana*, p. 308.]

² [Boswell's *Letters*, p. 110.]

³ [Boswell's *Letters*, p. 287.]

⁴ [*Ibid.*, pp. 159, 249.]

⁵ [*Ibid.*, p. 243.]

⁶ [*Ibid.*, p. 181.]

when he carried his son to Eton, and, fitting his conversation to his company, had "his classical quotations very ready"; but, instead of vaunting his scholarship, confesses that the creditable part he contrived to keep up was due to "the art of making the most of what he had."¹ He speaks of the pleasures of knowledge, and conceives they must be great to truly learned men, because he, "who knew so little," has experienced them.² "The ambition which," he says, "had ever raged in his veins like a fever," made him indulge in dreams of a brilliant reputation in Westminster Hall; but while he fostered the idea, he called it "a delusion," and expressed his belief that, if practice came, his want of acquaintance with the forms and technicalities of law would lead him "to expose himself."³ According to an anecdote related by Lord Eldon, he signally verified his own prophecy. At a Lancaster assizes he was found lying drunk upon the pavement, and the wags of the bar drew up a brief, which they sent with a guinea fee, instructing him to move for what they denominated the writ of *Quare adhæsit pavimento*. The judge was astounded, the bar laughed, and an *amicus curiæ* explained that it was the mover for the writ who, the night before, had adhered to the pavement.⁴ But it appears to us that the credulity which could credit the story must be at least as great as that which it imputed to Boswell. Nor, though Lord Eldon represents himself to have been among the actors in the scene, is the authority sufficient to countervail the inherent improbability of the incident. Many of his anecdotes were written in advanced age, at the request of his grandson, when the boundary which separates memory from imagination was broken down. Some of them are known to be exceedingly inaccurate, and we have little doubt that, as constantly happens at his time of life, he had confounded things

¹ [Boswell's *Letters*, pp. 308, 316.]

² [*Ibid.*, p. 253.]

³ [*Ibid.*, pp. 267, 268.]

⁴ [Twiss's *Life of Eldon*, 3rd ed., vol. i. p. 93.]

talked of with things done.¹ Whatever may have been Boswell's forensic foolery, the learned lawyers who made him the subject of their practical jokes could not have had a clearer perception than he himself displays in his letters that his talents were all of the lighter kind. Once, when mentioning that his second son had "much of his father," he subjoins the almost pathetic comment—"Vanity of vanities!"² He carried his self-knowledge further still, and spoke as of an admitted fact of the "strong degree of madness in his composition."³ He wished the circumstance to be intimated to a lady with whom he was in love as an excuse for his irregularities, and with the intention of reconciling her to them.⁴ The very notion that he would advance his suit by proving himself to be a madman showed that he was mad. There were others besides David Hume who concurred in the idea that his extrava-

¹ An instance of this common failing, and one of which he himself was the object, is mentioned by Boswell. An erroneous account of his first introduction to Johnson was published by Arthur Murphy, who asserted that he witnessed it. Boswell appealed to his own strong recollection of so memorable an occasion, and to the narrative he entered in his Journal at the time, to show that Murphy's account was quite inaccurate, and that he was *not* present at the scene. This Murphy did not venture to contradict. As Boswell suggested, he had doubtless heard the circumstances repeated till at the end of thirty years he had come to fancy that he was an actor in them. His good faith was unquestionable, and that he should have been so deluded is a memorable example of the fallibility of testimony, and of the extreme difficulty of arriving at the truth. [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 133.] Another story respecting Boswell in Lord Eldon's anecdote-book is an evident exaggeration. He represents Boswell as calling upon him at his chambers to ask his definition of *taste*. He refused to give an answer which he was sure would be published by his interrogator; but Boswell, he says, continued calling frequently to importune him on the subject. [Twiss's *Life of Eldon*, vol. i. p. 208.] The importunity of Boswell would be credible enough, if the topic had been less strange, or even if the person to whom he applied had been Burke, Thurlow, or Reynolds. That, in spite of repeated refusals, he should have gone again and again on such an errand to Sir John Scott, who had paid no attention to matters of the kind, who made no pretension to literary or artistic connoisseurship, and whose mode of speaking and writing was peculiarly wanting in all the graces of composition, is far less likely than that this consummate lawyer in the decline of his faculties should have had a confused recollection of the transactions of his earlier days.

² [Boswell's *Letters*, p. 315.]

³ [*Ibid.*, p. 121.]

⁴ [*Ibid.*, p. 98.]

gances were not wholly free from insanity. "The earth," wrote John Wilkes, during a drought which occurred contemporaneously with the publication of the *Life of Johnson*, "is as thirsty as Boswell, and as cracked in many places as he certainly is in one."¹

There is scarce a frailty in Boswell but is found in combination with some virtue which rarely unites with it. Dr. Johnson has remarked in the *Adventurer* that perhaps the commonest of all lies are lies of vanity.² Boswell was among the vainest men that ever existed, and he was also among the most veracious. He neither invented circumstances to add to his credit, nor, as we have already remarked, concealed the facts which inflicted humiliation. He offered to a young lady, and told her, in pleading his cause, that it was a circumstance in his favour that she liked his family seat. "I wish," she replied, "I liked you as well as I do Auchinleck."³ Such rebuffs are detailed with the same frankness that he repeated a compliment. He cringed to Lord Lonsdale in the hope of being put into Parliament, and when his claims were rejected with disdain, and he suffered pangs from mortified pride and a sense of abasement endured in vain, he reveals his fault and his punishment to Temple with the openness that he would have related his triumphant election.⁴ Amid his many weaknesses, it should never be forgotten that he was truth itself.

As his vanity did not taint his veracity, so neither did his ambition generate envy. His passion for distinction, and the feeling often expressed, till success at the close of his days attended his *Life of Johnson*, that his career had been a failure, never rendered him jealous of those who had outstripped him in the race, or unjust to their merits. "Often," he wrote, "do I upbraid and look down upon myself when I view my own inferiority, and think how much many others, and amongst them you, Temple, are

¹ [Wilkes's *Letters*, vol. iv. p. 5.]

² [*The Adventurer*, No. 50.]

³ [Boswell's *Letters*, p. 126.]

⁴ [*Ibid.*, p. 324.]

above me."¹ He had a generous appreciation of excellence wherever it was to be found; and, though it has been sometimes alleged that he was hostile to Goldsmith, the charge proceeds upon the erroneous assumption that he has represented him unfairly. He has paid no grudging tribute to what was admirable in him, and his account of his weaknesses is confirmed by such a phalanx of testimony that we must reject historical evidence altogether if we are to refuse to believe that the Irishman, whose writings would charm us into the conviction that he was a model of graceful manners, elegant conversation, and upright conduct, was, with all his genius and virtues, awkward, envious, conceited, and dissolute.

With his wonted complacency, Boswell enters in his notebook that M. d'Ankerville said of him "that he was the man of genius who had the best heart he had ever known."² "In general," observed the flattering Frenchman, "the brain consumes the heart," and he instanced Voltaire, Montesquieu, and Rousseau. Whatever may be thought of the genius, Boswell's letters attest the assertion of Sir William Forbes, that his warmth of feeling was very great. Johnson applied to Garrick the Greek saying—"He that has *friends* has no *friend*"; adding, "He was so diffused he had no man to whom he wished to unbosom himself."³ Boswell, in his passion for society, and his rage for knowing everybody, was more diffused than even Garrick, but on this head, as on so many others, he blended qualities which seldom coalesce, and had both friends and a friend. It is true he in one place intimates that his attachments were not durable, and, with the combined candour and vanity which were so eminently characteristic of him, he compared himself "to a taper which can light up a lasting fire, though itself is soon extinguished."⁴ But his inconstancy was of the kind which is inevitable with men whose social leanings are strong.

¹ [Boswell's *Letters*, p. 251.]

² [*Boswelliana*, p. 299.]

³ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 629.]

⁴ [Boswell's *Letters*, p. 180.]

He was hurried away by first impressions, and must often have found that faults which were hidden from superficial observation became apparent on a closer acquaintance. His select alliances were not less lasting because he had brief likings where colder minds would have remained apathetic. If his friendship survived the test of knowledge, it does not appear that he ever tired. His worship of Johnson rather increased than diminished, and he continued to cling to Paoli when the Corsican patriot had ceased to be a notoriety.

During the extreme depression which hung over him throughout his closing years, his spirits were still more sunk by seeing Sir Joshua Reynolds, who was wont to be esteemed the happiest man in the world, nearly as low as himself. The great painter, blind in one eye and in danger of losing the other, was debarred the use of his pencil, and was now brooding over the dismal apprehension of being compelled to lay it aside for ever. Boswell left the gayer scenes to which he fled for the dissipation of his own worse distress, to cheer with simulated vivacity the despondency of the friend to whose hospitality he was indebted for so many memorable acquaintances and brilliant hours. "I force myself," he writes, "to be a great deal with him, to do what is in my power to amuse him."¹ This single sentence speaks volumes for the tender and thoughtful constancy of him who penned it.

The correspondence with Temple, which extends from Boswell's boyhood to his death, is marked throughout by unlimited confidence and undiminished regard. The tone is that of hearty and often fervid friendship. In his youth Temple volunteered the loan of a thousand pounds, which was not accepted, to buy a commission in the Guards. Years afterwards Boswell referred to this proffered generosity in the language of glowing gratitude, and as establishing a claim for any assistance he could render.² "Your

¹ [Boswell's *Letters*, p. 344.]

² [*Ibid.*, p. 154.]

kindness," he says, in answer to some consolatory words addressed to him in the latter part of his life, "fairly makes me shed tears."¹ He attempted to write from his death-bed to this valued confidant, and, his strength failing him after the first line, he dictated the remainder, concluding with the words, "I ever am your old and affectionate friend here, and I trust hereafter."² Once again, in the midst of his sufferings, which were acute, he set his son to communicate with Temple. "His affection for you," says the brief note, "remains the same."³ Apparently the dying man retained him in his heart to the last conscious beat. "We have both lost a kind, affectionate friend," wrote Boswell's brother, when announcing that all was over, "I shall never have such another."⁴

Boswell appears in his usual motley colours in his domestic relations, and warmth of heart is curiously combined with unfeeling conduct. "You say well," he wrote to Temple at twenty-seven, "that I find mistresses wherever I am."⁵ He had not only a rapid succession of charmers, but sometimes two or three together, and inclined to give the preference now to one, and now to another. The facility with which he transferred his adoration promised ill for the permanence of his allegiance when his choice was fixed, nor either before marriage or after did his affection long restrain his profligate propensities. He relates how, when he went to Auchinleck to soothe his wife during her sickness, he deserted her to get intoxicated at the house of his neighbours, or invited his boon companions to get drunk with him at his own. He confesses with contrition that often and often when she was ill in London he sallied out to indulge in festivities, and came back the worse for wine at unseasonable hours to disturb her repose. Yet although, with these proofs of his ill behaviour, we cannot accept his assertion that "no man ever had a higher esteem, or a

¹ [Boswell's *Letters*, p. 333.]

³ [*Ibid.*, p. 356.]

² [*Ibid.*, p. 354.]

⁴ [*Ibid.*, p. 357.]

⁵ [*Ibid.*, p. 76.]

warmer love for a wife,"¹ it is certain that his fondness was far more fervent than is frequent among more considerate men. He loved Mrs. Boswell, but he loved dissipation also, and was much too weak to sacrifice the bad passion to the good. Hence he exhibits the anomaly of a husband at once faithless and doting—kind in intention, and constantly cruel in act. His affectionate nature broke out when his firstborn son died, immediately after his birth. This, which to many persons would have been only a disappointment, was a sorrow to him. Temple, who wanted the instincts to comprehend the distress, endeavoured to console him by representing that affection was irrational where there was no knowledge of qualities to endear. Boswell answered that it was a question of feeling and not of reason, and that it was vain to argue against emotions which he had experienced to be real. He justified his tenderness by the example of Adam Ferguson, the author of the *Essay on Civil Society*, who had been accustomed to maintain that till a child was four years old he was no better than a cabbage. The theorist became a parent, the infant died almost as soon as born, and he was plunged into grief.² The stoicism of philosophy is only heard by those in whom nature is silent. But it was the loss of his wife which showed the duration of Boswell's affection in its strength. Judging from the previous indications afforded by his career, we should have expected that the house of mourning would have been quickly forgotten in the house of feasting, and that new attachments would soon have obliterated the old in his supple heart. The miserable depression, on the contrary, into which he was cast by her death in 1789, continued, with rare intermissions, throughout the whole of the six years he survived her. His letters abound in piteous groans of anguish. The merriment which had heretofore flowed from an elastic mind, was now the laboured effort to relieve a despondent spirit. "I walk

¹ [Boswell's *Letters*, p. 293.]

² [*Ibid.*, p. 168.]

upon the earth," he says in one letter, "with inward discontent, though I may appear the most cheerful man you meet."¹ "I go into jovial scenes," he says in another, "but feel no pleasure in existence, except the mere gratification of the senses. Oh! my friend, this is sad."² It is upon this sad scene of hopeless dejection, aggravated by the attempted alleviations of debauchery, that the curtain finally falls, and leaves upon the mind the strangely mixed impression of amiable qualities marred by sensual indulgence, of talents rendered ridiculous by vanity and indiscretion, of truth and candour deprived of half their moral dignity by indiscriminate loquacity, and turned against their possessor through the many infirmities with which they were allied.

"There are few people," said Dr. Johnson to his future biographer shortly after they first met, "to whom I take so much as to you."³ The partiality which he conceived at the outset deepened with increased familiarity, and in 1773, when their intimacy had lasted for ten years, he wrote to Boswell, "Think only, when you see me, that you see a man who loves you, and is proud and glad that you love him."⁴ In 1777 he said to him, in conversation, "My regard for you is almost greater than I have words to express,"⁵ and a twelvemonth later he reiterates in a letter "that he very highly esteemed, and very cordially loved him."⁶ The sarcasms which he sometimes aimed at his worshipper in conversation take nothing from the weight of his deliberate commendation. In the fervour of colloquial contest he spared, as his biographer states, and as the *Life* evidences, "neither sex nor age."⁷ Once, when Boswell was lamenting that he had not been a contemporary of Pope, Johnson is reported to have burst forth with, "Sir, he is in the right, for, perhaps, he has lost the opportunity of having his name immortalized in

¹ [Boswell's *Letters*, p. 312.]

² [*Ibid.*, p. 343.]

³ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 153.]

⁴ [*Ibid.*, p. 266.]

⁵ [*Ibid.*, p. 561.]

⁶ [*Ibid.*, p. 619.]

⁷ [*Ibid.*, p. 364.]

the Dunciad.”¹ On another occasion Boswell asked if a man might not be allowed to drink wine to drive away care, and enable him to forget what was disagreeable. “Yes, sir,” replied Johnson, “if he sat next *you*.”² On a third occasion the company were talking how to get Mr. Langton out of London, where he was dissipating his fortune, and Boswell proposed that his friends should quarrel with him in order to drive him away. “Nay, sir,” Johnson joined in, “we’ll send *you* to him. If your company does not drive a man out of his house, nothing will.”³ But his sarcasms were the sallies of the minute, produced by a passing provocation, as in the last of these instances the dictator confessed that he had spoken in anger to take revenge for some observations of Boswell during a discussion upon the Americans. The stroke is felt by him who receives when it is forgotten by him who gives it, and Johnson, who intended his antagonist to reel under the blow, always appeared surprised that he should smart from the bruise. “Poh, poh,” he said to his biographer, when complaining of one of his retorts, “never mind these things.”⁴ Except in the momentary heat of debate, he never once varied from his panegyrical language, and when coupled with the general popularity of Boswell, it may be taken for an evidence that his better qualities were most conspicuous to those who knew him, as his worse assume the greatest prominence now that they are no longer modified by the presence of that heartiness, vivacity, and good humour, which, to be felt, must have been known. But there were especial reasons why he should win upon Johnson. The literary monarch could not be insensible to the exuberant homage of the most devoted of his subjects. The perpetual liveliness, again, of Boswell, and his intense enjoyment of existence, were more than ordinarily attractive to a man whose principal effort in life was to drive away the gloom which

¹ [Northcote's *Life of Reynolds*, vol. ii. p. 189.]

² [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 243:] ³ [*Ibid.*, p. 602.] ⁴ [*Ibid.*, p. 136.]

clouded his mind. With this view, as he tells in the sketch of himself in the *Idler*, under the name of Sober, his chief pleasure was conversation;¹ and he considered "a tavern chair the throne of human felicity." "There," he said, "I experience an oblivion from care; I dogmatise and am contradicted, and in this conflict of opinion and sentiments I find delight."² No one ministered to his colloquial cravings with the same zeal and skill as the inquisitive young Scotchman, whose own passion was social converse, and who was eager to hear the sentiments of the dictator on all subjects, human and divine. Notwithstanding his eagerness for discussion and his denunciation of Englishmen for disregarding the common rights of humanity by their sullen silence when two strangers were shown into a room together, Johnson had the peculiarity of rarely opening his lips till his companions addressed him. He said that Tom Tyers had described him truly as being like a ghost, who never spoke till he was spoken to.³ Boswell did him the service to draw him out, and questioned and cross-examined him as a counsel might a witness, not only upon the passing topics of the day, but upon the events of his life, the characters he had known, and the opinions he had formed. Much as he must have loved to descant to an auditor so insatiable and discerning, he was sometimes weary of answering before Boswell was tired of asking. "I will not," he once broke out, "be baited with *what* and *why*; what is this? what is that? why is a cow's tail long? why is a fox's tail bushy?" Boswell pleaded that he ventured to trouble him because he was so good. "Sir," replied Johnson, "my being so good is no reason why you should be so ill."⁴ It added vastly to the charm of his inquiring companion that though an admiring, he was not an obsequious listener. Johnson was a master of fence, and took supreme delight in the animation of contest and

¹ [*The Idler*, No. 31.]

² [Hawkins's *Life of Johnson*, p. 87.]

³ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 287.]

⁴ [*Ibid.*, p. 585.]

the pride of victory. Talk would have been tame to his apprehension with a deferential disciple, who flung down his weapon and acknowledged himself defeated at the first thrust. The pertinacity of Boswell, which roused him to exertion and gave him an opportunity for the display of his dexterity, was essential to his satisfaction. Even the profligacy of his disciple, which could not be entirely concealed from him, was in a large degree atoned for in his eyes by the better principles which accompanied it. The great moralist, as he was called, was at all times inclined to be over-lenient to errors of practice as long as the principles continued sound; and the perpetual resolutions of poor Boswell to amend, and his ready submission to the observances of the Church, might well keep alive the toleration of infirmities which always seemed on the eve of extinction. In a note which Johnson wrote to introduce him to John Wesley, he says, "I give it with great willingness, because I think it very much to be wished that worthy and religious men should be acquainted with each other."¹ The advantage of a friendship which looks so ill-assorted at a casual glance and so perfectly suitable upon a closer inspection, was evenly balanced; and if the credit from the alliance was chiefly reaped by the lesser of the two, the biographer has amply repaid the distinction the living hero conferred. Johnson is the most remarkable exception upon record to his own maxim that "the best part of an author will always be found in his writings."² "He is greater," said Burke, "in Boswell's books than in his own,"³—a high compliment to Boswell as well as to the conversation of Johnson, and one which the illustrious statesman did not extend to the numerous other Lives and recollections which appeared, when he remarked, in his forcible metaphorical style, "How many maggots have crawled out of that great body!"⁴

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 631.]

² [*The Rambler*, No. 14.]

³ [Burke to Sir J. Mackintosh, Boswell's *Johnson*, Croker's preface, p. xvi.]

⁴ [*Memoir of Hannah More*, vol. ii. p. 101.]

DR. JOHNSON

1 OF all the persons who have made literature their exclusive profession, and who have risen from a low origin to a splendid reputation, Dr. Johnson is the most striking. He arrived in London poor and friendless. For years he remained in a state of beggary. Works which will last as long as the language brought him, when most successful, inadequate fame, and less adequate profit, and he had no lucky hits till, at the age of fifty-three, he obtained a pension which afforded him a frugal competence. Oppressed with want, he was, further, the victim of a constitutional melancholy which darkened prosperity itself, and of a constitutional indolence, the effect of his malady, which rendered exertion more than ordinarily irksome to him. With these accumulated disadvantages he never lost courage, though he must many times have lost hope. As he says in his letter to Lord Chesterfield, he was like "a man struggling for life in the water," but the water which went over his head could not go over his soul.

He did buffet it

With lusty sinews, throwing it aside

And stemming it with heart of controversy.¹

| Amid all the subsequent inquiries which were addressed to him respecting his early days, no complaint of hardship or neglect, and, what is more surprising, no boast of difficulties conquered, ever escaped his lips. Yet even

¹ [*Julius Cæsar*, Act I. sc. ii.]

his rare magnanimity makes but a small part of his moral greatness. He passed through these long years of privation with a "surly virtue" and a lofty independence which nothing could bend. Mixed up with a rabble of authors as hungry and ragged as himself, he was never seduced into imitating their laxity of principle and dishonest shifts. No superior was ever courted by him, no dishonourable act was ever done by him, no falsehood was ever spoken by him, no line opposed to conscience was ever penned by him. Far from lowering his spirit to his circumstances, his dignity amounted to haughtiness, and his resolution to stand by his convictions to dogmatism. As little did he attempt to adapt his productions to the taste of the multitude. Beginning life at a period when the tone of society was not high, his principal works were devoted to enforcing didactic sentiments in stately diction, and it was consequently long before they attracted much notice. Slowly his uncouth figure emerged from the crowd, and in spite of an ungainly appearance, slovenly habits, and disputatious violence, he grew to be courted by his equals in genius, and his superiors in rank. The sun had no more power over him than the wind. He continued to maintain his bold bearing and uncompromising pertinacity, and was as stiff in opinion with Burke as with Tom Davies, in the saloon of Mrs. Montague as in the shop of Cave. This rugged manliness was joined to a beneficence which was only bounded by his means, and which would itself have entitled him to be remembered among the names whose example should be kept before the eyes of the world. The vast intellect which has dignified and immortalised his other qualities was entirely worthy of them. He tried many departments of literature, and was supreme in some, and eminent in all. His conversation was still more remarkable than his writings, and has conferred upon him a species of fame which no second person shares with him in any considerable degree. The

extraordinary traits combined in him have met with a delineator unrivalled in minuteness, fidelity, and skill. Every characteristic has been preserved to us, and there were few among his friends who knew him with the completeness that he is known to posterity. |

Johnson was born at Lichfield on the 18th of September, 1709. It has been taken for granted that he was christened Samuel after his godfather, Doctor Samuel Swinfen, a physician in extensive practice, who was a lodger in the house of his parents; but two of Mrs. Johnson's brothers were named Samuel and Nathaniel, and these were the names she gave her two sons. The eyes of the infant soon showed symptoms of disease, his body broke out in scrofulous sores, and altogether he was so miserable an object that his aunt afterwards told him she would not have picked up such a creature in the street. Dr. Swinfen said he never knew a child reared with so much difficulty.¹ He grew to be a man of massive frame and giant strength, but his hereditary disease continued in some of its aspects to taint his constitution to the close of his days. He declared that "he knew not what it was to be totally free from pain."² "I inherited," he said, "a vile melancholy from my father, which has made me mad all my life, at least not sober."³ "Poor dear Collins!" he exclaims, in a letter to Joseph Warton, in 1754. "Let me know whether you think it would give him pleasure if I should write to him. I have often been near his state, and therefore have it in great commiseration."⁴ Collins was then insane. To hope or fear beyond the limits of probability was, according to Johnson's definition, a degree of lunacy,⁵ and as his depression was often disproportioned to his circumstances, he pronounced it aberration of intellect. In this estimate he considered too exclusively external

¹ Johnson's *Autobiography*, in Croker's *Boswell*, p. 812.

² Hawkins's *Life of Johnson*, p. 395.

³ Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 336.

⁴ Wooll's *Memoirs of Joseph Warton*, p. 229.

⁵ *Rasselas*, ch. xliii.

objects, and forgot that a disordered circulation, or an enfeebled digestion, might be just as substantial and a more imperious cause of dejection than poverty and disappointment.

Johnson's father, Michael, was born at Cubley, in Derbyshire, in 1656, and his mother, Sarah Ford, was born at King's Norton, in Worcestershire, in 1669. They did not wed till late in life, when the husband was fifty and the wife near forty years of age. Sarah Ford was the daughter of a yeoman in Warwickshire, or, in other words, the owner of a small estate which he farmed himself. She had a sister who married a Mr. Harrison, of Birmingham, and who is described by Johnson as "a very mean and vulgar man, drunk every night, but drunk with very little, very peevish, very proud, very ostentatious, but luckily not rich."¹ Her brother is said by Hawkins and Malone to have been a physician of eminence, but this may be doubted, since we are told by Johnson that "the only one of his relations who ever rose in fortune above penury, or in character above neglect,"² was a cousin, Cornelius Harrison, who became perpetual curate at Darlington, and was son of the self-important, mean, vulgar, peevish, drunken Birmingham citizen. The reputed physician of eminence had not found an alliance above the general level of the family connections, if the position of his wife, who was "coarse and good-natured,"³ may be inferred from her manners. He, too, had a son, Cornelius, who entered the Church, and who was equally infamous for his profligacy and famous for his wit. He was the original of the clergyman who sits by the punch-bowl in Hogarth's *Midnight Modern Conversation*. When Lord Chesterfield went ambassador to Holland, Ford requested to be appointed his chaplain. Lord Chesterfield replied that he would have taken him if he had only had one vice more,—

¹ Johnson's *Autobiography*, p. 813.

² To Mrs. Thrale, Aug. 12, 1773; Johnson's *Letters*, vol. i. p. 105.

³ Johnson's *Autobiography*, p. 813.

a vice which was almost worse than all the others put together, but which would have prevented the scandal the others produced.¹ Johnson had a high opinion of his powers. He told Sir John Hawkins that "he was a man of great wit and stupendous parts";² and, speaking of him in the *Lives of the Poets*, he says that "the abilities which furnished convivial merriment to the voluptuous and dissolute, might have enabled him to excel among the virtuous and wise."³ According to Boswell, Mrs. Johnson was herself a woman of distinguished understanding. For this he had the authority of the epitaph by her son, in which he says "that she excelled in acuteness of mind, and soundness of judgment."⁴ All the circumstances which he related of her would leave a contrary impression. He loved but did not respect her, and the love he chiefly ascribed to her practising self-denial to procure him coffee. She was always telling him "to learn behaviour," a species of admonition which he designated "cant," and as often as he answered that she ought to teach him what to do and what to avoid, she was reduced to silence.⁵ Having eaten voraciously of a leg of mutton, when he was ten years old, at the house of his aunt Ford, his mother assured him seriously that it would hardly ever be forgotten, which drew from him the comment that she "had lived in a narrow sphere, and was affected by little things."⁶ She was a pious woman, and was anxious to impress her son with her principles, but, wanting wisdom, the result of her good intentions was to make Sunday "a heavy day to him." He complained that she confined him to the house, and compelled him to read the *Whole Duty of Man*, from a great part of which he could derive no instruction.⁷ She was quite

¹ *Richardsoniana*, p. 225.

² Hawkins's *Life of Johnson*, p. 2.

³ *Lives of the Poets*, vol. ii. p. 276.

⁴ Hawkins's *Life of Johnson*, p. 578.

⁵ *Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, pp. 21, 24, 27.

⁶ Johnson's *Autobiography*, p. 813.

⁷ Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 15.

unacquainted with books, and would talk to her husband of nothing except his affairs, which were embarrassed, and of which he hated to hear. Even of her single unwelcome topic "she had," says Johnson, "no distinct conception, and therefore her discourse was composed only of complaint, fear, and suspicion."¹ He thought that, subsequent to the incident of the leg of mutton, her understanding "became much enlarged, or that greater evils wore out the care of less."² The last was likeliest to be the truth, when we remember that she must have been upwards of fifty before the improvement commenced. Without ideas derived from either reading or observation, and with an apparent want of practical sense in her conduct, she must, in intellect, have been below the average of women. Her merit was in a disposition so benevolent that she was beloved by all who knew her, and when some sharper endeavoured to despoil her of a field, there was not an attorney in the place who would undertake his cause. It was of her that Johnson wrote the line in the *Vanity of Human Wishes* :

The general favourite as the general friend.³

Her strong affection begot in her son a corresponding attachment. "These little memorials soothe my mind," he wrote in after life, when recording a couple of observations she had made to him in his childhood, and which are too trifling to be worth repeating.⁴ On the death of the mother of his friend Mr. Elphinston he sent him a letter of consolation, and admonished him to set down minutely all he could remember of her from his earliest years. "You will read it," he said, "with great pleasure, and receive from it many hints of soothing recollection, when time shall remove her yet further from you, and your grief shall be matured to veneration. To this, however painful for the present, I cannot but

¹ Johnson's *Autobiography*, p. 812.

² *Ibid.*, p. 813.

³ *Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 8.

⁴ Johnson's *Autobiography*, p. 813.

advise you, as to a source of comfort and satisfaction in the time to come.”¹ This recommendation reveals his object in putting upon paper observations which in themselves were absolutely insignificant; and if we consider what a robust and manly heart he had, and how he toiled for bread at one period of his life, and how distinguished he was at another, we shall be struck with the tenacity of the love which, in the midst of this hurry or splendour of existence, could make him dwell with fondness on the most trivial instances of maternal kindness.

Nothing is recorded of his father's family, except that he had a brother who was by profession a boxer and wrestler, and who was such a proficient in his calling that, during a twelvemonth in which he kept the ring in Smithfield, he was never once thrown or defeated.² “I have great merit,” said Johnson, “in being zealous for subordination and the honours of birth, for I can hardly tell who was my grandfather.” Though his mother's connections were mostly vulgar, she despised her husband's because they were lower than her own, and her husband retaliated by a real or affected contempt for hers.³ He himself had risen no higher than to keep a bookseller's shop in Lichfield, and a stall in Birmingham and other places on market days. At Birmingham, where her relations were congregated, he probably became acquainted with his future wife. That his local business was insufficient to procure him a livelihood, and that he was forced to make the circuit of distant towns, and stand at stalls in the open air, is a proof that his dealings must have been of a contracted and comparatively humble kind. A trait, which his son related in subsequent years, gives a lively idea of a large class of the country customers of the time. A man, who had exhausted every argument in cheapening a work which he wanted to purchase at a price below its value, at last

¹ Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 67.

² *Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 5.

³ Johnson's *Autobiography*, p. 812.

urged, as an irresistible motive, "You know, Mr. Johnson, that I buy an almanack of you every year."¹ The itinerant nature of his trade was advantageous to him. It afforded a double relief to his disorder, by compelling him to be much on horseback, which benefited his health, and by enabling him to escape from his gloomy home. The woman, so tender to the rest of the world, aggravated, through want of tact, the distress she should have soothed. Her husband was glad to take refuge in silence from dissertations on economy and predictions of ruin, and when her harangues grew intolerable he rode away to solicit orders.² His ambition was beyond his lot. He had a considerable share of vanity, which was a good deal kept down by adversity,³ and was foolish in talking of his children, which was one of the forms that his vanity assumed. His very caresses were loathed by his son, because they were always the preface to some exhibition of his premature abilities. "That," he said, "is the great misery of late marriages; the unhappy produce of them becomes the plaything of dotage. An old man's child leads much such a life as a little boy's dog, teased with awkward fondness, and forced to sit up and beg." To avoid the infliction, he used to run away when visitors called, and hide himself in a tree.⁴ But Michael Johnson was a man of real attainments. "He propagates learning all over this diocese," wrote the chaplain of Lord Gower, in 1716; "all the clergy here are his pupils, and suck all they have from him."⁵

In the same year in which Johnson was born his father chanced to be sheriff of Lichfield, and the pride of paternity supplied him with a pretext for gratifying that pride of display which was inherent in his nature. It was

¹ Percival Stockdale's *Memoirs*, vol. ii. p. 102.

² *Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, pp. 3, 13; Johnson's *Autobiography*, p. 812.

³ Johnson's *Autobiography*, p. 812.

⁴ *Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, pp. 10, 11.

⁵ [*Gentleman's Magazine*, Oct., 1791; Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 4, note.]

customary for the sheriff, accompanied by the principal inhabitants, to ride the circuit of his jurisdiction in pompous procession, and when the bookseller was asked by his wife "whom he would invite to the riding," he answered, "All the town now." His hospitality on the occasion was as sumptuous as it was general. "He feasted the citizens," says Johnson, "with uncommon magnificence, and was the last but one that maintained the splendour of the riding." He would have done better to have anticipated the prudence of his successors, and dropped a ceremony which was unsuited to his means and position. He was oppressed by debts contracted in his youth, and his ordinary mode of living was so little in keeping with his public entertainment that, to avoid the expense of having his neighbours to tea, he condemned his wife to isolation, and prohibited her from paying or receiving visits. When the good woman reverted to these melancholy years, she declared that, if the time were to pass again, she would have refused to comply with his unsocial injunctions.¹ Notwithstanding his economy, the profits of his trade were insufficient for his needs. His very workshop tumbled down from want of money to repair it. His house was laid open by the accident, and he continued every night to lock the front door, regardless of the fact that anyone could walk in at the back. This his son mentioned as an instance of that prevalence of imagination over reason, which he did not hesitate to call madness.² It was more probably an instance of the prevalence of habit.

The rejoicings of the bookseller at the birth of his child were soon disturbed by fears for his health. He was put out to nurse with a woman whose son was shortsighted and scrofulous, and in the opinion of Dr. Swinfen he imbibed the bad humours of his foster-parent with her milk. His mother believed that he derived his diseases

¹ Johnson's *Autobiography*, pp. 812, 813.

² *Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 4.

from her own family, and Mr. Croker thought that "he inherited them from his father, with the morbid melancholy which is so commonly an attendant on scrofulous habits." Thus a taint flowed to him through every channel, and the concentrated effects may be supposed to have increased the malignity of his disorder. After remaining ten weeks with the nurse, he was, he says, "taken home a poor, diseased infant, almost blind."¹ He was two years and six months old when it was announced that, on March 30, 1712, Queen Anne would exercise her royal prerogative of touching for the King's Evil. Natural remedies had failed to remove the sores on his body, and restore sight to his eyes, and Sir John Floyer, then a physician at Lichfield, advised that recourse should be had to supernatural means.² Floyer was a man of such repute that, in the estimation of Johnson, "his learning and piety deserved to be recorded."³ In a day when superstition was no longer in vogue, so enlightened a practitioner could hardly have believed that the power of working miracles was an hereditary attribute of our English monarchs, and he may merely have countenanced the experiment from a charitable reluctance to crush the hopes which the anxious mother entertained. Her faith was strong; for, being pregnant with her second and last child, Nathaniel, she concealed the fact lest she should not be permitted to incur the risks of a tedious journey. Various little incidents of his London visit remained impressed on Johnson's mind, and he not only remembered the Queen, but at the age of thirty months he brought away a sentiment of the imposing air she derived from her station and dress. "He had," he said, "a confused, but somehow a sort of *solemn* recollection of a lady in diamonds, and a long black hood."⁴ Two hundred persons underwent the ceremony, which was the last lingering triumph of

¹ Johnson's *Autobiography*, p. 812.

² Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 7.

³ Nichols's *Literary Anecdotes*, vol. v. p. 19.

⁴ *Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 10; Johnson's *Autobiography*, p. 812.

credulity over experience. No sovereign has since attempted to cure scrofula by a touch.

The physical infirmities of Johnson did not keep down his mental powers. His precocity was remarkable, and incited, if it did not justify, the tormenting exhibitions which were the delight of his father. When he was in his third year, his mother spoke to him "of a fine place, called heaven, to which good people went, and of a sad place, called hell, to which bad people went," and, to fix it in his mind, she sent him to relate what he had heard to their workman, Thomas Jackson.¹ Johnson recommended the practice, and said that it was chiefly to his telling over again in his childhood the knowledge which was communicated to him, that "he owed his uncommon felicity of remembering distant occurrences, and long past conversations."² There is nothing unreasonable in the supposition that a few such lessons might have accustomed him to listen with concentrated attention, for the sake of being able to give a correct report to the servants in the nursery or the yard. By whatever means acquired, his memory was extraordinary. While yet a child in petticoats, his mother bid him get by heart the collect for the day. She left him to learn it, and by the time she reached the second floor he followed her up the stairs. "What's the matter?" she asked. "I can say it," he replied, and repeated it correctly.³

He was taught to read by a dame named Oliver. On his leaving Lichfield for the university, his simple old mistress, whose notions of mankind were bounded by her experience of her little pupils, brought him a present of gingerbread, and assured him "he was the best scholar she ever had." In the zenith of his fame he spoke of the incident with pride, and added with a smile that "this was as high a proof of his merit as he could conceive."⁴

¹ Johnson's *Autobiography*, p. 812; Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 5.

² *Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 28.

³ Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 6.

⁴ Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 7; Dr. Percy, in Nichols's *Illustrations of Literary History*, vol. vii. p. 306.

Children love the marvellous, whether of fact or fiction. "Babies," he said, "do not want to hear about babies. They like to be told of giants and of castles, and of somewhat which can stretch and stimulate their little minds." His nurse had indulged the propensity from his infancy, and among other specimens of legendary lore, he remembered her relating to him the history of St. George and the Dragon.¹ The passion continued when he had learnt to read. He devoured the romances of chivalry in his boyhood, and retained sufficient fondness for them in his manhood to prefer to all other books, when he spent part of the summer of 1764 at the country parsonage of Dr. Percy, the folio volume of *Felixmarte of Hircania*, which he diligently perused, in the original Spanish, from beginning to end. His works do not betray this extensive acquaintance with Quixotic literature, and the general tenor of his criticisms would discountenance the notion that it had exercised much influence on his mind. Nevertheless his excursions into the realms of fancy had vehemently excited his imagination, and to the predominance of the wonders of fiction over the sober realities of life he attributed the want of steady application which had prevented his pursuit of a profession.² His hesitation to reject the belief in ghosts may be imputed to the leaven of his boyish tastes. He read *Hamlet* at nine years of age, and the ghost scene made him rush from the kitchen to the street door that he might get into company. The recollection of his early preferences led him to despise the attempts to embody moral instruction in homely tales, and when Mrs. Thrale appealed to the numerous editions of *Tommy Prudent* and *Goody Two-Shoes* to prove their popularity, he replied, "Remember always that the parents buy the books, and that the children never read them."³

The poverty of Johnson's parents had no effect in

¹ *Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, pp. 15, 16.

² Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 9

³ *Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, pp. 20, 16.

cramping his education. The books and knowledge of the father must have contributed to give a literary turn to the mind of the son, and the Grammar School of Lichfield afforded a cheap and effectual training in the classics. Thither he was sent in his eighth year. From the outset he excelled all his competitors, and "was indulged and caressed" by the usher, Mr. Hawkins, "a man," he said, "very skilful in his little way." At the end of two years and four months the lad was promoted to the upper school, and cried at his removal. He had reason to lament both the kindness he was leaving, and the harshness which awaited him. Such were the happy incentives to learning at Lichfield, that every advancement brought with it an increase of punishment. He first came under the dominion of Mr. Holbrook, who was "peevish and ill-tempered," and when he rose to the division superintended by the head master, Mr. Hunter, the peevishness was exchanged for ferocity.¹ It has been truly observed that the chief art of education is to teach children to teach themselves. Mr. Hunter acted upon the maxim, according to his own compendious method. "He never," said Johnson, "taught a boy in his life; he whipped, and they learned."² The system answered with a prodigy like Johnson, who could accomplish unaided any task he undertook, and who, from constitutional indolence, would only work when he was compelled. "My master," he said to Langton, "whipped me very well; without that, sir, I should have done nothing." But with boys of ordinary capacity, who could not acquire the power of unravelling the difficulties of ancient authors by acquiring the will, there could have been no other motive for the excesses of Hunter than want of patience, or love of cruelty. The love of cruelty would appear to have preponderated. "He was very severe," said Johnson, "and wrong-headedly severe. He

¹ Johnson's *Autobiography*, p. 813; Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 7.

² Rev. Mr. Parker, Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 836.

used to beat us unmercifully, and he did not distinguish between ignorance and negligence, for he would beat a boy equally for not knowing a thing, as for neglecting to know it. For instance, he would call up a boy, and ask him the Latin for a candlestick, which the boy would not expect to be asked. Now, sir, if a boy could answer every question, there would be no need of a master to teach him." Having employed a flimsy pretext for the mere pleasure of inflicting pain, he would yet exclaim, as he flogged, "And this I do to save you from the gallows." The single advantage, and it was not slight, which his rule afforded was that the standard of excellence was high. Johnson acknowledged that "the scholarship of Hunter was very great," and Dr. Taylor, another pupil, informed Boswell that Holbrook "was one of the best scholars and best preachers of his age." But even in the retrospect, when the suffering was past, and the benefit remained, the wanton brutality of the master was remembered with disgust, and no man who had been educated by him was ever known to put a son under his charge.¹ His countenance was as stern as his disposition, his manner was pompous, and he always appeared in school in full canonicals and a full-dressed wig. With this awful dignity he blended a passion for shooting, and would at any time pardon an offender who could direct him to a covey of partridges. As his granddaughter, Miss Seward, asserted that he was a foundling, who owed his name to the circumstance that the gentleman who adopted him had picked him up in a field when out hunting, he may have derived from his original patron that taste for sports which mingled so strangely with his scholastic pedantry, his savage temper, and his ecclesiastical self-importance.²

Of Johnson's character when under Hunter we have an account by his class-fellow, Mr. Hector, and the early traits

¹ Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 8; *Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 21.

² Rev. Mr. Parker, in Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 836; Davies's *Life of Garrick*, vol. i. p. 3; Nichols's *Illustrations of Literary History*, vol. vi. p. 311.

which he and others have recorded of him all attest the justice of Boswell's remark, that he is a memorable example of the saying that the child is the man in miniature. The independence, which never forsook him, had already displayed itself while he was a pupil of Dame Oliver. He one day started to return home, without waiting till his servant came to fetch him, and as he was so short-sighted that he could not step across the kennel without going down on his hands and knees to observe its position, his mistress followed at a little distance to keep him from danger. Chancing to observe her, he flew into a passion at the insult to his manliness, and attempted to beat her.¹ The feeling broke out, in a more ludicrous form, when, in his tenth year, he was sent with his brother to spend a vacation at Birmingham. His father went to bring them back, and offended Samuel by telling the ostler that "he had twelve miles home, and two *boys* under his care." The young gentleman who, at ten years old, was indignant to be called a boy, and to be thought to require a protector, had just written to his mother to express his delight at having got a rattle to his whip.² The affectation of manhood is too common with children to be numbered among the special peculiarities of Johnson. His other qualities were more individual. As was his habit in maturer years, he drove off his occupations to the latest moment, and, when compelled to grapple with a task, completed it with unequalled rapidity. He had just as great an aversion as during his subsequent career to the use of the pen, and would dictate verses and themes to his favourites, but would never be at the trouble of writing them. He exhibited at school the same readiness of memory which afterwards astonished his literary associates, and his companion Hector, having on one occasion recited to him eighteen verses, he repeated them with the variation of only a single epithet. He had the same proud averseness as in later life to be subordinate to anybody with

¹ Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 6.

² Johnson's *Autobiography*, p. 813.

whom he came in competition—a passion which was stronger than his native indolence, and seconded the stimulus he received from the rod of his master. “They never,” he told Boswell, with evident exultation, “thought to raise me by comparing me with anyone; they never said Johnson is as good a scholar as such a one, but such a one is as good a scholar as Johnson; and this was said but of one, but of Lowe; and I do not think he was as good a scholar.” The sway which he afterwards exercised over his contemporaries in the world was surpassed by his supremacy over his youthful comrades. To earn his help in their lessons, three of them in rotation attended every morning at his father’s house, and seated on the back of one, and held up on each side by the others, he rode the little journey in triumph. The tribute to his mental pre-eminence was the more remarkable that it was not assisted by his feats in the playground. His physical inertness, still more than his imperfect sight, kept him from joining in the rivalry of games, and it was wonderful, he said, how well he had contrived to be idle without them. The single sport for which he cared was of a kindred nature with the lazy indulgence which made him insist on being carried to school. He was pulled in winter along the ice by a garter tied round his waist, and the boy who dragged him was compelled to go barefooted that he might keep himself from falling. His ordinary recreation, on holidays, was to saunter through the fields with a friend; but he talked more to himself than to his companion, and had already acquired that abstraction of mind which led him to mutter his thoughts, unconscious probably of his own utterance, or else oblivious of the presence of others.¹ In one respect, if we were to trust the report of Mrs. Thrale, the youth was very unlike the man. His cousin Ford, prognosticating his future eminence as a writer, told him that he would make his way more easily in the world as he showed no disposition to dispute anybody’s claim to

¹ Hawkins’s *Life of Johnson*, p. 7; Boswell’s *Johnson*, pp. 8, 9.

conversational superiority. Either, however, he was restrained by the presence of his relative, or the observation must have been made during a lull in his usual habits; for he told Boswell that "when he was a boy he always chose the wrong side of a debate, because most ingenious things could be said upon it."¹

In 1771, when Johnson was staying at Ashbourne, he regretted that it was out of his power to extend his ramble to Hayley and its neighbourhood. "I should have had," he said, "the opportunity of recollecting past times, and wandering *per montes notos et flumina nota*, of recalling the images of sixteen, and reviewing my conversations with poor Ford."² It was in 1725 that he passed a few weeks at the house of his cousin, and it was then that his demeanour conveyed the impression that he was devoid of colloquial ambition. His modesty did not obscure his abilities, and Ford, who had conceived a high idea of his capacity, advised that he should be removed to a school at Stourbridge, in Worcestershire, where there was a master who instructed as well as flogged. The expense was beyond the bookseller's means, and it was agreed that the lad should teach the younger boys in return for his education and board. His new preceptor was a Mr. Winkworth, who had the childish vanity to change his name to Wentworth, that he might be thought to be related to the Strafford family. "He was a very able man," said Johnson, "but an idle man, and to me very severe; but I cannot blame him much. I was then a big boy; he saw I did not reverence him, and that he should get no honour by me. I had brought enough with me to carry me through; and all I should get at his school would be ascribed to my own labour, or to my former master. Yet he taught me a great deal." The example of idleness which was set by Mr. Wentworth was imitated by Johnson, who told Dr. Percy that,

¹ *Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 14; Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 150.

² *Letters to Mrs. Thrale*, vol. i. p. 42.

whereas at Lichfield he learnt much at the school but nothing from the master, at Stourbridge he learnt from the master but nothing in the school. His neglect of his studies, coupled with the singular independence of his nature which, with a person he did not respect, was likely to display itself in insubordination at the headstrong age of sixteen, may account for a part of the rigour he experienced. Yet, wherever he went, we find him acquiring an ascendancy by his extraordinary talents. Boy though he was, they procured him admission into the best company of the place, and notable instances were long remembered at Stourbridge of the attentions which had been paid him from admiration of his powers.¹

Johnson was an advocate for corporal punishment. "He upon all occasions," says Boswell, "expressed his approbation of enforcing instruction by means of the rod." "There is now less flogging," he remarked to Dr. Burney, "in our great schools than formerly, but then less is learned there; so that what the boys get at one end they lose at the other."² The harshness, however, of Holbrook, Hunter, and Wentworth had not only convinced him that the power was sometimes abused, but that the love of domineering was a settled infirmity of schoolmasters. "What reconciles them," he said, "to long lessons is the *pleasure of tasking*."³ He wisely held what are called holiday tasks in abhorrence, and he told Mrs. Thrale that "he had never ceased representing to all the eminent masters in England the absurd tyranny of poisoning the hour of permitted pleasure by keeping future misery before the children's eyes, and tempting them by bribery or falsehood to evade it." The pedagogic faith in the virtue of the system was not shaken by his arguments. Dr. Sumner, of Harrow, did indeed yield after long solicitation, but died before the next vacation

¹ Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 9; Hawkins's *Life of Johnson*, p. 8; Dr. Percy, in Nichols's *Illustrations of Literary History*, vol. vii. p. 306.

² Boswell's *Johnson*, pp. 8, 469. ³ Johnson's *Autobiography*, p. 814.

arrived. "That lad," said Johnson, of a youth with a sullen and sheepish manner, "looks like the son of a school-master, which is one of the very worst conditions of childhood. Such a boy has no father, or worse than none; he can never reflect on his parent, but the reflection brings to his mind some idea of pain inflicted or of sorrow suffered."¹ Happiness is comparative, and in his most prosperous period, when he contrasted the transient miseries of his early days with the deeper woes he had subsequently endured, he maintained that "a boy at school was the happiest of human beings." "Ah! sir," he said, "a boy's being flogged is not so severe as a man's having the hiss of the world against him."²

From Stourbridge Johnson went back to Lichfield, and lived, or as his biographer expresses it, "loitered at home for two years in a state very unworthy his uncommon abilities." The disproportion between his performances and his large conceptions of what was possible often caused him to accuse himself unjustly, and his acknowledgment that he was idle has not been sufficiently qualified by Boswell, whose own narrative refutes the assertion. Johnson, he relates, once said to him, "Sir, in my early years I read very hard. It is a sad reflection, but a true one, that I knew almost as much at eighteen as I do now." When he made this confession he was fifty-four. He told Langton that his great period of study was from twelve to eighteen; and on another occasion he mentioned to Boswell that in the very interval during which he is described as loitering he did not read works of amusement, "but all literature, sir, all ancient writers, all manly."³ The passion for knowledge is strongest in youth, because the charm of novelty is then conjoined with the ardour of acquisition. The cravings of a vigorous mind in Johnson more than counterbalanced its sluggishness, and he was hurried along by eager curiosity and the delight of new

¹ *Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, pp. 24, 28.

² Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 153.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 10, 12, 152.

ideas. One day he climbed to an upper shelf in his father's shop to look for some apples which he suspected had been hidden by his brother behind a large folio. The folio was the Latin and Italian works of Petrarch, and having heard him mentioned among the restorers of learning, he fastened upon it immediately, and read it nearly to an end. These were casual feats. His studies were neither continuous nor systematic, and he was scolded by his father for his want of steady application.¹ There are two kinds of students—those who work quietly and constantly, and those who apply vehemently and fitfully. The methods differ much the same as walking does from running. The one who goes quickest clears a greater space in a short time, and is soonest out of breath. Johnson, in reading, was among the runners. He glanced his eye rapidly from the top to the bottom of the page, and seemed, in the words of Boswell, to devour it ravenously. "He gets at the substance of a book directly," said Mrs. Knowles; "he tears out the heart of it."² All such persons, in the many truant hours in which they abandon their desk, appear idle to casual observers. But there is a repletion of the mind as well as of the body, and if society did not compel these pauses, memory could not retain the knowledge, nor reason digest it. Seldom, however, has a man of his acquirements been equally desultory. He assured Boswell that, though from his earliest years he loved to read poetry, he hardly ever got to the end of a poem.³ If anyone spoke of having read a book through, he heard the assertion with incredulity. His advice to others was framed on his own practice. He had never persisted in a plan for two days together, and did not believe that much good could be got from task-work.⁴ Unless inclination conspired with diligence, nothing, he maintained, made a strong impression. "That," he said,

¹ Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 12.

² *Ibid.*, p. 591.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

"which is read without pleasure is not often recollected, nor infixed by conversation, and therefore in a great measure drops from the memory. Thus it happens that those who are taken early from school commonly lose all that they had learned."¹ When a man opened a volume in the middle and was entertained, he advised him not to leave off and go to the beginning, lest his interest in it should die away and be no more renewed.² He thought it one of the advantages of having a large library that a subject could be pursued the instant the fancy arose. "If," he urged, "you have not a book immediately ready, and the subject moulds in your mind, it is a chance if you have again a desire to study it."³ He used to recommend young people always to carry a work in their pocket that they might dip into it at bye times. "It is by this means," he said, "that all my knowledge has been gained, except what I have picked up by running about the world."⁴ He concluded from the effects that some persons, such as Bentley and Samuel Clarke, must have studied hard, but nobody, he affirmed, had done it whose habits he had known. His notions of what ought to be the attainments of a scholar led him to depreciate his own. He always denied that his learning was extensive, though Adam Smith considered him to be acquainted with more books than anyone alive.⁵ Tyers asserts that he had the most knowledge in ready cash of all the celebrities he ever met, and that he appeared, from his innumerable quotations, to be the man in the whole of England who had taken the widest range. Churchill, the poet, made an observation which alone must be conclusive to those who are familiar with Johnson's labours, that if it was true that he had read little, he could not be the author of his nominal works. The mere quotations in his Dictionary would show what

¹ Johnson's *Autobiography*, p. 813.

² Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 508.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 559.

⁴ *Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 52.

⁵ Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 16.

a vast variety of authors he had skimmed. In theology, metaphysics, philology, and even in Latin scholarship, though all of them subjects in which he was far better versed than he was willing to allow, he had been surpassed by others who had made a special study of one or other of these departments of knowledge; but very few writers in his own class—that of general literature—have excelled him in the aggregate extent of his information. He had larger stores, on the whole, than Dryden, Addison, Swift, or Pope, every one of whom, and especially the first three, were learned men. Poetry, criticism, moral precepts, maxims of life, and biographical narratives, require embellishments of style, quickness of observation, miscellaneous reading, and habits of thought, rather than the concentrated diligence which exhausts a topic. To dig the ore from the mine, and to strike the coin at the mint, are separate operations, and he who does the one is seldom qualified for the other. To reproach men of letters, as has often been done, with being inferior to natural philosophers in science, to theologians in divinity, and to classic commentators in Greek and Latin, is to complain that a single man has been gifted with but a single genius, and has only, like other mortals, a day of twenty-four hours in which to exercise it. If Addison could not have elaborated the *Principia*, Sir Isaac Newton was just as incompetent to write the *Spectators*.

The tastes of Johnson would have led him to prefer discursive reading to treading in a single track, but he had the advice of his cousin Ford to second his inclinations. "Obtain," urged this counsellor, who was a sagacious observer of life, "some general principles of every science; he who can talk only on one subject, or act only in one department, is seldom wanted, and perhaps never wished for; while the man of general knowledge can often benefit, and always please."¹ Pascal had before enforced the

¹ *Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 14.

same maxim. "You tell me that such a person is a good mathematician, but I have nothing to do with mathematics. You assert of another that he understands the art of war, but I have no wish to make war upon anybody. The world is full of wants, and loves only those who can satisfy them. It is false praise to say of anyone that he is skilled in poetry, and a bad sign when he is consulted solely about verses." The people that he thought the most pleasant and the most praiseworthy were those who bore the badge of no profession, who were neither called poets nor mathematicians, but were good judges of both, and who, upon entering a room, could join in the conversation they found going on at the moment. Special attainments are required in but few in each generation. The grand business of life is carried on by persons of diversified knowledge, who would leave an immense portion of their best functions undischarged if they were only proficient in one pursuit.

Johnson once mentioned that he could bind a book, from which Hawkins infers that after his removal from Stourbridge he followed his father's trade. The supposition is refuted by his statement to Boswell that he had no settled plan of life, and merely lived from day to day.¹ The profits of the shop were too trivial to offer any inducement to a youth whose powerful understanding, various literature, and classical acquirements, rendered him much more fit to write books than to bind and sell them. His ambitious father must equally have rejected the idea of burying his talents in the drudgery of a petty business. At the commencement of his twentieth year an opportunity occurred of pushing forward in his learned career without the expenditure which his necessitous parents could not supply. A former schoolfellow, of the name of Corbett, had been twenty months at Oxford. The system of private tutors had not commenced, and, as he wanted assistance in his studies, he promised, if

¹ Hawkins's *Life of Johnson*, p. 9; Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 12.

Johnson would become his teacher and companion, to maintain him at the University. On the faith of this engagement Johnson went to reside at Pembroke College, in October, 1728. The bookseller accompanied him, and was full of the merits of his son. He informed the fellows "that he was a good scholar, and a poet, and wrote Latin verses." The fellows noticed the uncouth figure and strange manners of the subject of the panegyric, and if, from the little promise his appearance afforded, they heard the account with incredulity, and ascribed it to the simplicity of the provincial citizen, they were quickly undeceived. Having sat silent for some time, Johnson suddenly struck into the conversation, and to the astonishment of the company, quoted Macrobius. "I had looked," he said to Boswell, "into a great many books which were not commonly known at the universities, where they seldom read any books but what are put into their hands by their tutors." So unusual were his attainments, that Dr. Adams, who was afterwards master of the college, told him he was the best qualified student that had ever, in his experience, come to Oxford.¹

Mr. Jorden, the tutor, was a heavy, illiterate man, "who scarcely," said Johnson, "knew a noun from an adverb."² His new pupil attended his lecture the first day, and the next four days was absent. On the sixth day Jorden inquired the reason, and Johnson answered that he had been sliding in Christ Church Meadow. "This I said," he remarked to Boswell, "with as much nonchalance as I am now talking to you. I had no notion that I was wrong, or irreverent to my tutor." "That, sir," replied Boswell, "was great fortitude of mind." "No, sir," rejoined Johnson, "stark insensibility."³ He meant that he was a stranger to the regulations of the place, and to the respectful deference exacted by the authorities.

¹ Hawkins's *Life of Johnson*, p. 9; Boswell's *Johnson*, pp. 12, 13.

² Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 13; Nichols's *Literary Anecdotes*, vol. ix. p. 58.

³ Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 13.

He had instantly detected the incompetence of Jorden,¹ and was not aware that he was bound to sit out disquisitions from which nothing could be learned. When he grew familiar with the obligations which the college discipline imposed, his passion for the ice, which had continued from his schoolboy days, tempted him, heedless of a lecture on logic, to slide again a whole morning. "I expected," he said, "a sharp rebuke for my idleness, and went with a beating heart. When we were seated he told me he had sent for me to drink a glass of wine with him, and to tell me he was not angry with me for missing his lecture. This was, in fact, a most severe reprimand. Some more of the boys were sent for, and we spent a very pleasant afternoon."² The wisdom of the heart, with Jorden, supplied the place of the wisdom of the head. His kindness was habitual, and he won by his indulgence the esteem which he forfeited by his ignorance. He was not only lenient within the limits of his own jurisdiction, but he would battle to the last for the youths under his care, when they were threatened with punishment by sterner judges. The truant, who had been rewarded by a pleasant afternoon party for evading a tedious morning lecture, related with pride in subsequent years, that none of the good man's scholars ever suffered for slight improprieties while he had breath to defend, or power to protect them. "Whoever," Johnson said on another occasion, "becomes his pupil, becomes his son," and so much did the benefits of his fatherly guardianship preponderate over the disadvantages of his scanty learning, that the pupil declared, in the plenitude of his fame, "that if he had had sons to send to college, Jorden should have been their tutor."³

The jealous independence of Johnson was a stronger motive to insubordination than his indolence or love of sliding. He was by no means irregular in his conduct,

¹ *Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 30.

² Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 89.

³ *Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 38; Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 13.

but he liked to show by occasional rebellion that he was not obedient from submission, and he frequently stirred up his companions to emulate his spirit. It was customary for a servitor to knock, at certain hours, at the doors of the undergraduates, and unless they answered the challenge they were returned as out. Johnson resented the interference with his freedom, and rather than reply he would sometimes choose to be included among the delinquents, or he would join with his fellow-collegians in chasing the servitor, clattering pots and candlesticks as they went, and singing, from the old ballad—

To drive the deer with hound and horn, etc.

They did not stop at taunts, for Hawkins says that the life and limbs of their victim were often endangered.¹ Johnson found means to intimidate the authorities as well as their deputies. Steevens mentioned to him a report that his translation of Pope's *Messiah* into Latin verse was either an exercise or an imposition. "No, sir," Johnson replied; "at Pembroke the former were always in prose, and to the latter I would not have submitted. I wrote it to show the tutors what I could do. It answered my purpose; for it convinced those who were well enough inclined to punish me that I could wield a scholar's weapon as often as I was menaced with arbitrary inflictions. Before the frequency of personal satire had weakened its effect, the petty tyrants of colleges stood in awe of a pointed remark, or a vindictive epigram. But since every man in turn has been wounded, no man is ashamed of a scar."² Even the ordinary fines for missing lectures were an offence to the haughty student, and one of his "pointed remarks" was employed to revenge this badge of his subjection. "Sir," he exclaimed to Jorden, "you have sconced me twopence for non-attendance at a lecture not worth a penny."³ He used to laugh in his manhood at the

¹ Hawkins's *Life of Johnson*, p. 13.

² *Johnsoniana*, No. 309.

³ Hawkins's *Life of Johnson*, p. 9.

recollection of his insolence, and said it was "endured with a gentleness that astonished him whenever he thought of it." Dr. Adams, who was then only a junior fellow, ventured to expostulate mildly with him, and, as Johnson admitted to Dr. Percy, made him really ashamed of himself, "though I fear," he added, "I was too proud to own it."¹ There is no intimation that he had sufficient humility to correct the faults he had too much pride to confess.

The traits which had signalised him at school were retained at college. His maiden declamation was a characteristic exhibition of three of his prominent qualities—his procrastination, his memory, and his readiness. He neglected to write the essay till the morning he was to deliver it, learnt a part of it as he walked from his room to the hall, and delivered the remainder extempore. When he related the feat at Thrale's, and one of the company observed that it was a prodigious risk, he replied, "Not at all; no man, I suppose, leaps into deep water who does not know how to swim."² Hasty and negligent in the performance of his tasks, he did not the less manifest his usual reluctance to be outdone by competitors. There was a Mr. Meeke, who stood to him at Oxford in much the same relation that Lowe had done at Lichfield. "I remember," Johnson said, nearly five-and-twenty years later, "that at the classical lecture in the hall I could not bear his superiority, and I tried to sit as far from him as I could that I might not hear him construe."³ His general pre-eminence over Meeke was unquestioned, and the empire which had been conceded to the schoolboy was, with equal unanimity, conferred on the undergraduate. He was loved, caressed, and looked up to by everybody.⁴ He spent much of his time in lounging about the college

¹ *Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 30; Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 17.

² *Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 30; Mr. Windham in Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 837.

³ Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 89.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

gate, surrounded by a circle of admiring students, whom he entertained by his talk. "Sir," said one of his contemporaries, Mr. Edwards, at an accidental interview with him, half a century afterwards, "I remember you would not let us say *prodigious* at college. For even then, sir (turning to Boswell), he was delicate in language, and we all feared him." "Sir," continued Johnson, in explanation, when Edwards was gone, "they respected me for my literature; and yet it was not great but by comparison. Sir, it is amazing how little literature there is in the world."¹ Edwards himself, who settled in London as a Chancery solicitor, was a conspicuous example of the observation. Happening to fall in with Johnson, after the renewal of their acquaintance, he remarked, with curious simplicity, "I am told you have written a very pretty book called the Rambler." This was near thirty years from the time when it had first made its author famous. Living for the most part in the metropolis, where it had been a subject of universal conversation, where it was exhibited in the shop of every bookseller, and was to be found on a thousand tables, the prosperous solicitor had apparently never set eyes upon the celebrated work of his old associate, had certainly never had the curiosity to look into it, and was ignorant, even by report, of its nature. "I was unwilling," said Johnson, "that he should leave the world in total darkness, and sent him a set."²

As the young Oxonian appeared among the scholars like a king among his subjects, he "was gay and frolicsome," and overflowed with what seemed to be irresistible mirth. When this was repeated to him by Boswell, he replied, "Ah, sir, I was mad and violent. It was bitterness which they mistook for frolic. I was miserably poor, and I thought to fight my way by my literature and wit; so I disregarded all power and all authority."³ Possessed with the pride of intellectual superiority, his spirit rose against the contempt which he suspected would be excited

¹ Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 598.

² *Ibid.*, p. 684.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

by his indigence, and his constant apprehension of ill-usage led him to assume an attitude of defiance before he was offended. "All my efforts from a boy to distinguish myself," said Swift, "were only for want of a great title and fortune, that I might be used like a lord by those who have an opinion of my parts." The determination of Johnson to make mind supply the place of money and rank was of a more dignified kind. He was not asking homage, but warding off insult. His talents fulfilled his purpose in exacting respect both from his tutors and companions, but they were powerless to allay the inward care which was produced by the failure of his pecuniary resources. Hawkins, whose account abounds in errors, states that "Corbett could not brook submission to a man who seemed to be little more learned than himself."¹ Had Corbett been the rival of Johnson in scholarship, he would not have needed him for a master. The probability is that the collegian of twenty months' standing, who condescended to take a youth with him to Oxford as his teacher, was too ignorant to pass ordinary examinations without private instruction. He never obtained a degree. Whether he was rendered restive by his knowledge or his incapacity, he broke his pledge to Johnson, and refused to pay the promised subsidy.² The poor student, whom he had deceived, went back to Lichfield, in December, 1729, and his distresses may be presumed to have been the cause of the dreadful illness which ensued.

"When he returned," says Mr. Hector, "I was apprehensive of something wrong in his constitution, which might either impair his intellect or endanger his life, but, thanks to Almighty God, my fears have proved false."³ "He was overwhelmed," says Boswell, "with a horrible hypochondria, with perpetual irritation, fretfulness, and

¹ Hawkins's *Life of Johnson*, p. 9.

² *Ibid.*, p. 10; Boswell's *Johnson*, pp. 12, 18.

³ Hawkins's *Life of Johnson*, p. 8.

impatience; and with a dejection, gloom, and despair, which made existence misery." There were times when he was "so languid that he could not distinguish the hour upon the town clock." His habits were sedentary, and he looked to exercise for a remedy. He often walked to Birmingham and back, a distance of thirty-two miles, and, finding no relief, he drew up a description of his symptoms in Latin, and asked the opinion of Dr. Swinfen.¹ Dr. Swinfen replied that "he could think nothing better of his disorder than that it had a tendency to insanity, and without great care might possibly terminate in the deprivation of his faculties."² The malady which preyed upon his spirits, and prostrated his energies, never perverted his reason, but he lived from henceforth in fear of the catastrophe, and sometimes believed that it was at hand.³ Until taught by experience, he did not, he said, understand how to manage his distemper.⁴ He had frequent recourse to the exhilarating effects of wine; but, though it was such a cordial to him that all his resolution was required to resist its temptations, he found that it ultimately aggravated the melancholy which for the moment it dispelled.⁵ He at last discovered that the simplest palliatives were the best,—cheerful society, constant occupation, abundant exercise, moderation in eating and drinking,—the regimen, in short, prescribed by common sense for all who desire to keep a sound mind in a sound body.⁶ The terrible attack which assailed him in 1729 exhausted its violence, and his finances improved with his health. His powers, his knowledge, his deep dejection were all calculated to excite the regrets of his fellow-townsmen that a career, which was full of promise, should be cut short by penury, and some of the members of the cathedral were supposed to have contributed the

¹ Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 14.

² Hawkins's *Life of Johnson*, p. 288.

³ Boswell's *Johnson*, pp. 15, 91.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁵ Hawkins's *Life of Johnson*, p. 288; Boswell's *Johnson*, pp. 24, 152.

⁶ Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 152.

funds which enabled him to resume his residence at Oxford.¹

Croker ascertained that Johnson's name remained on the books of Pembroke College till October 8, 1731; but the documents furnished no indication that he had been there in person after the 12th of December, 1729. It is clear, however, that he returned. He informed Mrs. Thrale that the "history of his Oxford exploits laid between Dr. Taylor and Dr. Adams," and Taylor did not arrive till June 27, 1730.² Dr. Taylor, on his part, confirmed the fact that they were at the University together, and one of the famous passages of Johnson's life grew out of their connection. Young Taylor was entered at Christ Church, where there was a celebrated tutor, Mr. Bateman. Johnson was accustomed to pay daily visits to his friend, and get from him the substance of Bateman's lectures. The remittances from Lichfield, which had been always small, soon stopped altogether. The clothes of the unhappy student were in rags, and his feet were visible through his worn-out shoes. He observed that his beggarly appearance attracted notice, and he went to Christ Church no more. A gentleman of his college directed a servitor to set a new pair of shoes at his door. He saw them on going out, and indignantly flung them away.³ The assistance was prompted by kindness, and proffered with delicacy, but it was the sort of relief which an overseer would have bestowed on a pauper, rather than the aid which a benefactor should have afforded to a scholar, and was sure to be rejected by a man who was ever on the watch to resent the indignities which his poverty might provoke. Yet, when Johnson came to relate the refusal of Savage to accept a suit of clothes, which had been sent him anonymously, he implied by his language that he thought the fastidiousness misplaced.⁴ If, indeed, it is

¹ Hawkins's *Life of Johnson*, p. 16.

² *Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 32; Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 18, note.

³ Hawkins's *Life of Johnson*, p. 10; Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 18.

⁴ Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*, vol. iii. p. 420.

a duty to give, it cannot be a fault to accept, unless want is a crime. If generosity is held to degrade the recipient, it cannot elevate the donor, who becomes by his proffered bounty a partner in the error. But, besides that contempt is too apt to mingle with compassion, the frequency of mean dependence in creatures who have neither the resolution to economise, nor the industry to work, makes high-minded persons intolerant of help, and wins admiration to over-scrupulous indigence. The conflict which Johnson had kept up for three years could no longer be sustained. He had contracted debts he could not defray. His father had done the same, and was now insolvent.¹ The tall, ungainly, familiar form of the destitute student, with his tattered garments, and his shoes in holes, disappeared from the streets of Oxford, and he retired to Lichfield without having obtained a degree, or having received from his college the smallest token of merit to redeem him from discredit in his native city.

The intercourse with gentlemen and scholars, the prevalent opinions, the stately buildings, the bookish atmosphere, the aggregate peculiarities which constituted the genius of the place, had a greater influence on the mind of Johnson than the direct lessons professed to be taught. Among some of his memoranda in Latin there is an entry, in October, 1729, to the effect that "he had bid farewell to sloth, and would turn a deaf ear for the future to her syren strains."² Whatever may have been his fitful application, he confessed that, in the main, "he had been very idle and neglectful of his studies."³ He asserted, in one of his essays, that, to a youth of quick sensibility, the supreme incentive to industry at the University was the reflection that he looked upon "those walls where a Hooker and a Hammond, a Bacon and a Newton, had once pursued the same course of science."⁴ A vision which inflamed

¹ Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 18; Hawkins's *Life of Johnson*, p. 17.

² Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 17.

³ Mr. Windham in Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 837.

⁴ *The Idler*, No. 33.

his imagination was too dreamy and distant to be an antidote to his indolence. He had more ground for the opinion he maintained in conversation that the principal advantage of a University was that reputation was there dependent upon learning;¹ but this motive to diligence was wanting when he found his ascendancy secured. Being a far better scholar than his tutor, he could not receive the stimulus from Jorden which a Bateman might have supplied. He assured Mr. Windham, in 1784, that he read Latin with as much ease when he went to college as in those closing days.² He certainly carried up with him a knowledge of the language which diminished the call for further toil. His previous proficiency is evidenced by his translation of the Messiah, which, though not printed till 1731, was composed in 1729. A copy was shown to Pope by a son of Arbuthnot, then a gentleman commoner at Christ Church, and Pope replied, "The writer of this poem will leave it a question for posterity whether his or mine be the original."³ A very famous schoolmaster, whose name is not mentioned, said he would rather take Johnson's opinion of a Latin composition than that of any other person in England."⁴ His practice, however, of skimming the works of all ages had beguiled him into sacrificing something of that purity which rigid scholars demand. He did not disdain expressions for which it would be vain to seek examples in the best Roman authors, and he, perhaps, would have considered it affectation in a modern to eschew the licence. Minute faults of composition can be detected in the works of any genius, however great, who writes in his native tongue, and trivial blemishes are still more likely to occur in a modern author who writes in Latin, even though his profession is to teach and edit classics, or though, in a different calling, he should waste that time upon the verbal

¹ Mr. Windham in Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 839.

² *Ibid.*, p. 837.

³ Hawkins's *Life of Johnson*, p. 13.

⁴ *Apophthegms, etc.*, in Hawkins's ed. of *Johnson's Works*, vol. xi. p. 199.

niceties of a dead language which ought to be employed in what, to him, are weightier things. Johnson had a copious variety of Latin phraseology, and what was far rarer, a profound insight into the genius and structure of the language. But he did not strain after extreme purism, and there are little slips in his poems which, nevertheless, scarcely detract from their merit, for the best of them are written with a mastery over the tongue, and with a force which has seldom been equalled. De Quincey characterises Johnson's Latin poetry with perfect truth, when he says, "He *possessed* Latin in a way that no extent of mere critical knowledge could confer. He wrote it genially, not as one translating into it painfully from English, but as one using it for his original organ of thinking. And in Latin verse he expressed himself at times with the energy and freedom of a Roman."¹ The pride of scholarship, anxious to display its knowledge, engenders a tendency to criticise modern Latin in a more captious spirit than vernacular writings. Johnson has not escaped the common fate, and his Latin verses have been sometimes judged upon narrow principles which leave altogether out of sight his peculiar skill. Many of his lines are not elegant or harmonious, but others are sweet and sonorous, and the style is in general vigorous and concise. He used the language with uncommon facility, and could converse in it, at every period of his life, with fluency and precision.²

He said that "what he read solidly at Oxford was Greek; not the Grecian historians, but Homer and Euripides, and now and then a little epigram." During the two years he spent at Lichfield, before he was entered at the University, he had neglected his Greek, and only looked at portions of Anacreon and Hesiod.³ His comparative backwardness in the language was an inducement to follow it up at Oxford, but he never acquired the

¹ [De Quincey, *Art of Conversation*, *Works*, vol. xiii. p. 161, note.]

² *Apophthegms*, etc., in Hawkins's ed. of Johnson's *Works*, vol. xi. p. 199.

³ Boswell's *Johnson*, pp. 16, 12.

mastery over it that he obtained over Latin. He was prone to underrate the amount of his progress, and Gifford once remarked to Jacob Bryant that Johnson had admitted that he was not a good Greek scholar. "Sir," replied Bryant, with an impressive air, "it is not easy for us to say what such a man as Johnson would call a good Greek scholar." "I hope," adds Gifford, "that I profited by that lesson—certainly I never forgot it."¹ Bryant was right in his hypothesis. Giants measure themselves with giants; and attainments which are great to the little are little to the great. Dr. Burney, the classic, found that, though Johnson was not universally skilled in the critical niceties of the tongue, his general knowledge of it was extensive. He could give a Greek word for almost every English one, read the language with ease, and occasionally wrote verses in it.² A Danish nobleman, who had been told how loudly he proclaimed his own deficiencies, introduced the topic at an interview, for the purpose, as he avowed, of favouring himself. Johnson accepted the challenge, and displayed such a copious acquaintance with Greek literature and learning that his antagonist was astonished. But, while his professed ignorance eclipsed the vaunted knowledge of common men, he was so scrupulous not to take credit for more than he possessed that he insisted he owed his triumph over the Dane to a Xenophon of Mr. Thrall's, which was the single Greek book he had read for ten years.³

The Lichfield bookseller was a Jacobite, and the political creed in which his son had been reared was confirmed at college. When Johnson commenced his academical career, there was a growing indifference to the cause of the Pretender, and complete despair of its success. His adherents in the country at large were few and lukewarm;⁴ but then, and long afterwards, the old opinions

¹ Gifford's *Works of Ford*, vol. i. p. lxii.

² Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 795.

³ *Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 54.

⁴ Lord Hervey's *Memoirs*, vol. i. p. 6.

kept their hold at Oxford. In the rejoicings which took place, in 1733, upon the defeat of the Excise Bill, the healths of Ormond, Bolingbroke, and James III. were publicly drunk round bonfires for three successive nights.¹ In 1749, some gowmsmen were convicted of drinking the health of Charles Edward, and the ministers, to set a stigma upon the Jacobite principles of the University, would not allow them to present an address of congratulation to George II. upon the peace.² Gibbon, who was entered at Magdalen College in 1752, and as a gentleman commoner was admitted into the society of the fellows, found them still indulging in constitutional toasts which were not expressive of the most lively fidelity to the sovereign upon the throne.³ Later yet, Warburton, in his attack upon Lowth, in 1765, insinuated that a person who had been trained in that seminary of disaffection could not be loyal to the reigning line of kings. This was the congenial atmosphere which Johnson breathed for three years. The distinctive commendation which he bestowed on Dr. Panting, the master of his college, was that "he was a fine Jacobite fellow."⁴ His own bias towards the exiled family was, after all, more a feeling than a conviction, and rather showed itself in aversion to the House of Hanover than in zeal for the House of Stuart. The prejudice which, for half his life, inspired his politics, passed by natural gradations from violence to apathy, and from apathy to recantation.

Tenets of immeasurably greater importance than his views on State affairs took their rise during his residence at Oxford. His mother's error in making Sunday a heavy day to him had its inevitable effect, and he seized the opportunity of emancipating himself from the observance of the Sabbath. "I fell," he said, "into an inattention to religion, or an indifference about it, in my ninth year.

¹ Lord Hervey's *Memoirs*, vol. i. p. 205.

² Tindal's *History of England*, vol. i. p. 398.

³ *Life of Gibbon*, edited by Milman, p. 65.

⁴ Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 17.

The church at Lichfield, in which we had a seat, wanted reparation; so I was to go and find a seat in other churches, and having bad eyes, and being awkward about this, I used to go and read in the fields on Sunday. This habit continued till my fourteenth year; and still I find a great reluctance to go to church. I then became a sort of lax talker against religion, for I did not much think against it; and this lasted till I went to Oxford, where it would not be suffered. When at Oxford, I took up Law's *Serious Call to a Holy Life*, expecting to find it a dull book, as such books generally are, and perhaps to laugh at it. But I found Law quite an overmatch for me; and this was the first occasion of my thinking in earnest of religion, after I became capable of rational inquiry."¹ He called the work of Law "the finest piece of hortatory theology in any language,"² and its power is proved by the magical influence it has exercised over the ablest minds. This was the treatise which completed the conversion of the learned but once licentious Psalmanazar, who was the only person whom Johnson much courted, whom he never contradicted, whom he unhesitatingly pronounced the best man he had ever known, and whose piety and penitence he affirmed to have exceeded almost all that is recorded in the lives of saints.³ Psalmanazar, like Johnson, had looked into the *Serious Call* accidentally. The clergyman from whose table he had picked it up took it from his hand, gave him an unfavourable account of it, and refused to lend it to him. Deeply impressed with the page at which he had glanced, he purchased a copy, and read it over and over with more eagerness and satisfaction than any work he had seen on the subject.⁴ It was the same treatise, again, which confirmed and extended the growing zeal of John Wesley, and had a prominent share in the formation of his

¹ Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 15.

² *Ibid.*, p. 217.

³ Boswell's *Johnson*, pp. 602, 754; *Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 173.

⁴ *Memoirs of Psalmanazar*, p. 258.

character. "It is said," writes Southey, "that few books have made so many religious enthusiasts."¹ Even the infidel Gibbon admitted that, "if it found a spark of piety in the reader's mind, it would soon kindle it to a flame."² The work is now neglected,³ but if goodness could trace its genealogy through all the intermediate steps to its source, how much of the excellence which at present exists in the world would be found to have had its origin in the writings of Law! The theoretical convictions which his arguments and exhortations had produced in Johnson, were turned into practice by the hypochondriacal attack in the winter of 1729. "I was for some years," he said to Boswell, "totally regardless of religion. It had dropped out of my mind. It was at an early part of my life. Sickness brought it back, and I hope I have never lost it since." BOSWELL. "My dear sir, what a man you must have been without religion! Why, you must have gone on drinking, and swearing, and—" JOHNSON (with a smile). "I drank enough, and swore enough, to be sure."⁴ The mental agony he was enduring, and his dread that his reason might any day give way, would have checked the levity of an understanding much less powerful than his, and might well convert his oaths into prayers.

He had profited by his stay at the University, and we must infer from his future character that it was no disadvantage to him that his residence was not prolonged. He revisited his haunts in 1754, and called upon his ancient rival, whose translations at lecture aroused his jealousy. On leaving the room he said to Warton, who accompanied him, "I used to think Meeke had excellent parts, when we were boys together at the college; but alas!

Lost in a convent's solitary gloom.

¹ Southey's *Life of Wesley*, vol. i. p. 50. ² *Life of Gibbon*, p. 27.

³ [This was written before Law's *Serious Call* had again become well known through modern reprints.]

⁴ Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 730.

About the same time of life Meeke was left behind at Oxford to feed on a fellowship, and I went to London to get my living. Now, sir, see the difference of our literary characters.”¹ The comment was an admission that the fellowship which would have rewarded his learning if he had remained, would have been injurious to his fame. Necessity was, with him, the mother of industry, and, unless pressed by want, he would rarely be persuaded to make a stroke with his pen. His efforts, short and far between, would probably have been confined to classical subjects. He would not have been forced to diverge from the traditional track of scholastic studies into the wide realms of his native literature, and instead of being numbered among the greatest English authors, both in verse and prose, he would have subsided into an annotator upon the prose and verse of Greece and Rome. The detriment to the world would not have been compensated by any increase of happiness to the individual. The morbid temperament, which indisposed him to exertions, rendered idleness misery. His peace required that he should be driven to work in defiance of the languor which tempted him to inaction. He would not simply have been lost amid the indulgence which a fellowship invited, but he would have been lost in gloom. Yet, while a student in rags in the University, the object of compassion to some and of ridicule to others, he was picturing prospects which all the triumphs of his manhood failed to fulfil. “When I was towering in the confidence of twenty-one,” he wrote to Langton, in 1759, “little did I suspect that I should be at forty-nine what I now am.”² There is reason to believe that he coveted honours which were absolutely insignificant in comparison with those he had won. On the death, in 1776, of the last Lord Lichfield of the second creation, Sir William Scott said to him, “What a pity it is, sir, that you did not follow the profession of the law! You might have been lord chancellor

¹ Boswell's *Johnson*, pp. 89, 90.

² *Ibid.*, p. 112.

of Great Britain, and attained to the dignity of the peerage; and now that the title of Lichfield, your native city, is extinct, you might have had it." Johnson was agitated by the visionary notion, and exclaimed with anger, "Why will you vex me by suggesting this when it is too late?"¹ Imbued as he was by professional ideas, there is nothing surprising in the ludicrous assumption of Sir William Scott that a successful lawyer was a more exalted personage than an immortal author; but it is fortunate that the author was not permitted to shape his own destiny, when he too would rather have been Lord Chancellor Lichfield than Samuel Johnson.

The situation in which he found himself after he was driven from the University must speedily have abated his towering confidence. He told Mrs. Thrale that "he had his own outset into life in his eye when he wrote the eastern story of Gelaleddin,"² and it is to his return from Oxford that the sketch refers. Gelaleddin had obtained reputation in the school of Asia, which was most celebrated for the learning of its professors and the number of its students. He passed from class to class, rather admired than envied by those whom the rapidity of his progress left behind; he was consulted by his associates as an oracular guide, and thought competent to appreciate the conversation of his masters. He fondly imagined that, if he was thus conspicuous in the brilliant regions of literature, he would shine with redoubled lustre in the twilight of his native place. "My reputation will fly before me, my arrival will be congratulated by my kinsmen and my friends; I shall see the eyes of those who predict my greatness sparkling with exultation, and the faces of those that once despised me clouded with jealousy." But when he entered his father's house, expecting to be greeted with pride and delight, "he was received, though not unkindly, yet without any excess of fondness, or exclamation of rapture." "His father had,

¹ Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 600.

² *Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 48.

in his absence, suffered many losses, and Gelaleddin was considered as an additional burden to a falling family. When he had recovered from his surprise, he began to display his acquisitions, but the poor have no leisure to be gratified with eloquence; they heard his arguments without reflection, and his pleasantries without a smile. He then applied himself singly to his brothers and sisters, but found them all chained down by invariable attention to their own fortunes, and insensible of any other excellence than that which could bring some remedy for indigence." Johnson had only one brother, and no sisters. In their stead there were the maiden sisters of his mother. They had hitherto lived with Cornelius Ford, and on his death, in the summer of 1731, they went to lodge with the bookseller. They crowded the house, and it was with difficulty that room could be found for the fresh-comer.¹ He had earned no money, he was no nearer a profession, he had no prospect of a provision, and was merely regarded as an encumbrance at bed and board. Gelaleddin hoped to obtain that attention from his neighbours which had been denied him by his family. "He sat for some days in expectation that the learned would visit him for consultation, or the great for entertainment." When nobody called,—“for who will be pleased or instructed in the mansions of poverty?—he frequented places of public resort, and endeavoured to attract notice by the copiousness of his talk." Some censured his arrogance and pedantry; others wondered why he should have taken pains to acquire knowledge which could never be of use to him; others admitted him to their tables, but, when he chanced to excel in wit and information, he was seldom invited again. "Sir," Johnson said, in his old age, recollecting perhaps the hostility he had provoked before his fame had reconciled his hearers to his pre-eminence, "there is nothing by which a man exasperates most people more than by displaying a superior ability of brilliancy in

¹ Hawkins's *Life of Johnson*, p. 19.

his conversation. They seem pleased at the time ; but their envy makes them curse him at their hearts.”¹ The sanguine anticipations of Gelaleddin were not easily repressed. He solicited employment, not doubting that his services would be eagerly accepted, and was told by one that he had no vacancy in his office ; by another, that his merit was above private patronage ; by a third, that he would not forget him ; and by a fourth, that he did not think literature of any utility in business.² This can easily be recognised as a true picture of the reception which would be given to a student in rags during the earlier half of the last century. The notion that genius will excite the deepest reverence in those by whom it is least understood is an ever-recurring and yet manifest delusion. Talent is best appreciated by talent, knowledge by knowledge ; and the man who imagines that the higher he is removed above his judges the more they will admire him, might equally conclude that he would look larger the further he receded, or his voice sound louder the greater the distance from which he spoke. Excellence must be perceptible before it can be applauded, and for a cultivated understanding to display its stores to untutored ignorance is much like exhibiting colours to the blind. Thus Johnson was left to endure the aggravated bitterness which conscious power imparts to neglect and poverty, and, with his expectations baffled, wretched in the present and without hope for the future, a less gloomy temperament than his would have been sunk in despondency.

Not long after Johnson got back to Lichfield his father had an attack of inflammatory fever, and died in December, 1731, when he was seventy-six years of age. In the Latin inscription which his son placed upon his tomb he is said to have been a fervent Christian, a zealous parent, an intellectual bookseller—insensible to danger, patient under toil, undaunted in adversity, and

¹ Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 722.

² *The Idler*, No. 75.

skilled alike in literature and affairs.¹ "The writer of an epitaph," observed Johnson to Dr. Burney, "should not be considered as saying nothing but what is strictly true. Allowance must be made for some degree of exaggerated praise. In lapidary inscriptions a man is not upon oath."² This allowance must be made for a panegyric which was composed by Johnson in his dying hours, when his mind, softened by his approaching end, chiefly reverted to tender recollections.³ The virtues may have existed, but defects are suppressed, and the prevailing associations connected with the bookseller were not of that exalted nature which the epitaph would suggest. His son never liked to dwell upon family reminiscences.⁴ Everything except the attachment of his mother had conspired to render his home cheerless, and even her kindness was partly poisoned by a rivalry between his brother and himself for her affection.⁵ The want of community of ideas between his parents was fatal to social conversation, and the days passed in querulous comments or sullen silence. His father's "vile melancholy" increased the gloom induced by the absence of domestic cordiality. Concealed poverty, which Johnson asserted was the corrosive that destroyed the peace of nearly every household,⁶ contributed its pangs, and was especially harassing to a vain and aspiring citizen who, while anxious to put on the appearance of greater means than he possessed, kept gradually dropping to a lower state till he ended in bankruptcy. Nothing better could be expected of a man who was deficient in the commonest business habits, and neither calculated the profits of trade, nor the expenses of living.⁷ His shifts and struggles had left such a mournful impression, that his son urged it as a reason for not talking of him. "One has," he said,

¹ Hawkins's *Life of Johnson*, p. 577.

² Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 469.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 798.

⁴ *Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 4.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

⁷ Johnson's *Autobiography*, p. 812.

"so little pleasure in reciting the anecdotes of beggary."¹ The very homage his father paid him had been converted into an instrument of torture in his boyhood, and seems to have declined at the moment when it would have been most prized. In what was probably the old man's final illness, he offended the dignity of the Oxford scholar by requesting him to occupy his place at the bookstall in Uttoxeter Market. "My pride," said Johnson, "prevented me from doing my duty, and I gave a refusal." More than fifty years afterwards, on his last visit to Lichfield, when his own life was visibly drawing to a close, he remembered his juvenile disobedience with compunction. He drove to Uttoxeter in a post-chaise on a rainy day, and going into the market at the full tide of traffic, stood for an hour, with his head bare, before the stall which had been his father's, exposed to the sneers of the crowd and the inclemency of the weather.² This has sometimes been considered an act of superstition, but should be more properly remembered among the noble examples of moral heroism. Johnson has properly defined "repentance to be the relinquishment of any evil practice."³ Where the misconduct has ceased from the lapse of time, and by the nature of things cannot be renewed, he knew how deceitful was that mental regret which calls for no sacrifices. He therefore wished to evidence to himself the sincerity of his repentance, by executing the office which he had formerly refused to discharge. He is reported to have said "that he hoped the penance was expiatory";⁴ but he distinctly declared, on other occasions, that he did not hold the doctrine of "a commutation of offences by voluntary penance," and he could have meant no more than that he hoped he had proved his contrition to be real. Never was there a son who had less upon his conscience, for he could recollect no second act of disobedience to his father.⁵

¹ *Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 4.

² Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 791.

³ *The Rambler*, No. 110.

⁴ Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 791.

⁵ Warner's *Tour through the Northern Counties*, quoted in Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 791.

At the decease of the bookseller, Nathaniel succeeded to the business. He was born in 1712, and died young, in 1737. Johnson wrote a Latin epitaph upon him, which says that he finished a short life by a pious death, at a time when his vigour of body and mind gave great promise.¹ In his contempt of small inconveniences he resembled his illustrious brother, who used to tell of him with pride that, when the company were lamenting the badness of the roads, he inquired where they could be, as he regularly travelled the country, and had never seen a bad road in his life.² Having been brought up to his father's trade, it devolved upon him by right. His elder brother had embarked in a more ambitious career, and was now to discover that any goods are more saleable than extensive learning and extraordinary talents.

To trace Johnson's history for several years is only to follow him from one scene of wretchedness to another. The trials he underwent in his next change made a deeper impression than might have been expected from the nature of the hardships, and the brevity of their duration. The most obvious resource of needy scholarship is to obtain a situation at a school, and in March, 1732, Johnson became an usher at Market Bosworth, in Leicestershire.³ In the summer vacation he revisited Lichfield, and on the 15th of July he made an entry in his diary, stating that he had reserved eleven guineas out of twenty pounds which he had just received, and which was the entire sum which would accrue to him from his father's effects till the death of his mother. He expressed his consciousness that he must now be the architect of his own fortune, and formed a resolution, which he nobly redeemed, that poverty should not engender intellectual torpor, nor want induce him to deviate from rectitude. He returned the next day to Market Bosworth on foot,

¹ Hawkins's *Life of Johnson*, p. 578.

² *Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 7.

³ Hawkins's *Life of Johnson*, p. 20.

and in another week he had left it in disgust.¹ Under no circumstances would he have been fitted for the post. Boswell, adopting an image from the Rambler, well remarks that his acquisitions had been obtained "by sudden irruptions into the regions of knowledge,"² and the man whose eye took in a page at a glance, and who seldom read a book through, could not have submitted to dwell, word by word, upon little piecemeal lessons, to hang for months over a single poem, and when the end was reached with one class to recommence it with another. Nor should we suppose that his grand and sententious style of explanation could have been intelligible to boys. "Men advanced far in knowledge," says Imlac to Pekuah, of the astronomer in *Rasselas*, "do not love to repeat the elements of their art, and I am not certain that, even of the elements, as he will deliver them connected with inferences and mingled with reflections, you are a very capable auditress."³ He has, doubtless, here embodied the result of his own attempts at elementary instruction. He complained heavily at the time of the monotonous drudgery, which must have been rendered more depressing by his dark distemper. "He did not know," he wrote to Mr. Hector, "whether it was more disagreeable for him to teach, or the boys to learn, the grammar rules."⁴ To the tedium inherent in the task was superadded the humiliations which arose from the menial nature of the office in those ruder days, when scholars, with more than the education of gentlemen, were treated with less than the consideration of servants. Johnson was exposed to double indignity. He had not only to suffer the ordinary mortifications of an usher, but he had to endure the tyranny of a coarse and insolent squire. This was Sir Wolstan Dixie, the patron of the school, in whose house he boarded, and at whose table he was employed to say grace. Nearly a quarter of a century earlier Pope had a

¹ Boswell's *Johnson*, pp. 19, 20, 21, note.

² *Ibid.*, p. 25.

³ *Rasselas*, chap. xlv.

⁴ Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 21.

passing acquaintance with the baronet; and writing to Cromwell on August 21, 1710, he declares "he had never met with a better bred or better natured gentleman."¹ The amount of good breeding and good nature he possessed, when he could venture to display his disposition without restraint, was illustrated by an incident which occurred about three years after the period when Johnson experienced his amiable qualities. He had been robbed of some diamonds, and suspected a Mrs. Elizabeth Barker to be the culprit. A portmanteau, filled with her clothes, had been carried to the shop of Mr. Nelson, a jeweller, whose sister was her acquaintance. On the 29th of November, 1735, Sir Wolstan Dixie, accompanied by a constable and one other person, rushed into the bedroom of Mrs. Nelson, and exclaimed, "Where is that rogue, your master,—that cursed old thief, with Betty Barker? He has robbed me of £1,600, and I will hang them both, if it cost me £10,000." He enforced his threats by oaths, and an apprentice appearing upon the scene, he seized him by the collar. He then proceeded with the constable to search all the rooms and boxes in the house. Nelson brought an action against him, and obtained £105 damages. Elizabeth Barker was tried for the theft and acquitted. She, in turn, brought an action for false imprisonment, and though the jury only awarded her five shillings in compensation for her wrongs, the proceedings elicited a fresh instance of the good breeding of Sir Wolstan. Paul Whitehead deposed that he chanced to be present at her trial for the felony, and overheard him say, with a preface of oaths, to one of the witnesses, "Don't sew up your mouth, but swear boldly."² By this vulgar ruffian Johnson was treated with "intolerable harshness," and after "a few months of complicated misery, which all his life afterwards he recollected with the strongest aversion, and even a degree of horror,"³ he

¹ [Pope's *Works*, vol. vi. p. 102.]

² Harris's *Life of Lord Hardwick*, vol. i. pp. 337-340.

³ Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 21.

preferred destitution to slavery, and suddenly abandoned his situation.

The few guineas which remained to the poor usher, from his patrimony of twenty pounds, was all that he could have possessed when ill usage drove him to relinquish the pittance he earned at Market Bosworth. He was again upon the world, and took refuge with his old schoolfellow, Mr. Hector, who was a surgeon at Birmingham. He became his guest for six months, and then removed, in 1733, to the house of a person named Jervis. It chanced that Mr. Hector lodged and boarded with Mr. Warren, a bookseller, and the proprietor of a local newspaper. Through this accidental association Johnson first came forth in his proper calling of an author. He contributed some essays to Warren's journal, and translated for him, while living with Jervis, the *Voyage to Abyssinia*, by Father Jerome Lobo.¹ Lobo was a Portuguese Jesuit, who, in 1625, was sent as a missionary to convert the natives. A century elapsed before the Abbé Le Grand gave a French version from the original Portuguese, and added a narrative of the events which befell the mission after the departure of Lobo, together with fifteen dissertations on the "antiquities, government, religion, manners, and natural history, of Abyssinia." The work of Le Grand appeared in 1728, the year in which Johnson went to Oxford. He met with it in the library of his college, and thence he borrowed it for his present purpose. His manner of executing the undertaking was characteristic. Having made a vigorous commencement, his vehemence was succeeded by a spell of indolence. The printer was at a standstill, he had no employment in the interval, and his family were suffering from want. Johnson, who was always touched by the plea of distress, immediately resumed his occupation, but consulted his ease by lying in bed, and dictating the translation to Mr. Hector. Little revision was bestowed

¹ Hawkins's *Life of Johnson*, p. 21; Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 21.

on composition which had been spoken off-hand. Hardly any of the proof-sheets were seen by Johnson,¹ and the book swarmed with barbarous errors for which the amanuensis and the printer were responsible. The alternations of lassitude and energy, the refusal to work except under compulsion, and the ease and rapidity with which he accomplished his task when once he grappled with it, his exclusive desire to get to the end of his labours, and his indifference to the state in which they went before the world, are traits of which we have already seen the germs, and which will constantly recur.

Lobo's portion of the work was much condensed; the portion of the Abbé Le Grand, which fills more than half the volume, was less curtailed. Le Grand had never visited the country, his topics are often dull and trivial, his information is commonly vague and meagre, his narrative is uniformly tame to insipidity. The chief interest of the book is in the travels of Lobo, which are curious and entertaining. Minute accuracy can scarcely have been preserved under the double disadvantage of an abridgment and the translation of a translation; but that Johnson aimed at a rigorous fidelity is apparent from the circumstance that, while epitomising the facts, he never casts them into the mould of his own mind. The unpretending simplicity of the old Jesuit father is preserved throughout. In the preface, where Johnson speaks in person, he speaks in character. He adopts the peculiar turns of thought and expression which are associated with his name, and in one passage, quoted by Boswell, exhibits them in their maturest form.² The authors of Queen Anne's time were then models of composition. The homely and familiar style of Swift, and still more the style of Addison, in which familiarity was combined with elegance, were considered to have brought the English tongue to its highest pitch of perfection. In three or four casual pages, written for a provincial bookseller, Johnson

¹ Boswell's *Johnson*, pp. 21, 22.

² [*Ibid.*, p. 22.]

showed that he had broken loose from the trammels of fashion, and had struck out a manner of his own, which has left a lasting trace upon the language. He repeats in the *Rambler* the anecdote of Alexander, who, when he was invited to hear a man sing like a nightingale, replied with contempt that he had heard the nightingale herself. "The same treatment," adds the essayist, "must every man expect whose praise is that he imitates another."¹ Whether he had early arrived at this conclusion by reflection, or whether his originality was the unpremeditated consequence of his mental training, the evidence of power was equal, and was prophetic of his future renown. He had made it a rule in conversation to do his best upon every occasion. He forebore to deliver his thoughts till he had reduced them to the clearest arrangement, he clothed them in the most forcible language he could command, and he never suffered a careless word to escape him.² By these means he had been insensibly forming himself to be a writer, and had been habituated to composition long before he put pen to paper. Where the outbursts of genius seem spontaneous, it is merely because the preliminary process has been kept out of sight.

The *Voyage to Abyssinia* bore on the title - page, "London, 1735."³ As the place was a fraud to give importance to the book, so the date, by a common device, may have been falsified to prolong the appearance of novelty. The translation was completed before February, 1734, when Johnson went to sojourn at Lichfield.⁴ Poverty may have compelled him to seek an asylum with his mother. He only received five guineas for his version of *Lobo*,⁵ which was less than a copying clerk would have charged for transcribing the manuscript, and considerably less than the compositor was paid for putting it into type. Unable to earn the wages of a mechanic, he issued pro-

¹ *The Rambler*, No. 86.

² Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 719.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁴ Hawkins's *Life of Johnson*, p. 26.

⁵ Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 22.

posals in August for printing, by subscription, in a five-shilling volume, the poems of Politian, with a life of the author, and a history of Latin poetry from the age of Petrarch. The preliminary essays were to be in Latin, like the poems. He had consulted his private tastes more than those of the public, and the project fell to the ground. He had to cast about to find more popular designs, and, on November 25, 1734, he volunteered his services to the Gentleman's Magazine, which had been started in 1731, and, though a poor compilation, had met with success. The proprietor was Edward Cave, the son of a shoemaker at Rugby, who had acquired some scholarship by his education at the grammar school of that place. He had lately promised a prize of fifty pounds for the best copy of verses on "Life, Death, Judgment, Heaven, and Hell," which led Johnson to conclude that good contributions would be purchased at an equivalent price. The opening looked propitious for an able man, who could improve without effort on the usual vapid contents of the Magazine. His proposition was to furnish original poems and inscriptions; short dissertations in Latin or English; remarks on authors ancient or modern, and forgotten pieces that deserved to be revived. "By this means," he said, "your literary article, for so it might be called, will be better recommended to the public than by low jests, awkward buffoonery, or the dull scurrilities of either party." The scholastic influence of Oxford was still strong upon him, or he would not have propounded the notion that some of the essays addressed to the world of English readers should be in the Latin tongue. Cave's publishing business had hitherto been confined to his periodical, and Johnson notified to him that he had further plans to propose if he "could be secure from having others reap the advantage."¹ "The schemes of a writer," he said, on a subsequent occasion, "are his property and his revenue, and therefore they must not be made common."² While he was uncertain of

¹ Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 23.

² *Ibid.*, p. 108.

the reception which might be given to his proposal, he did not think fit to disclose his name, and he requested that the answer might be directed to "S. Smith, to be left at the 'Castle,' Birmingham." An endorsement by Cave, on the back of the letter, shows that an answer was sent on December 2. Hawkins asserts that the reply was favourable, and that Johnson was retained as a regular contributor to the Magazine; but the tone of a communication to the same publisher, between two and three years later, seems to preclude the supposition that there could have been a previous connection.¹ If any employment was obtained, it was not remunerative. The ideas of Cave were the reverse of liberal. "He was," says Johnson, "a penurious paymaster; he would contract for lines by the hundred, and expect the long hundred."² He believed his fifty-pound prize to be extraordinary munificence. He expected that the most eminent authors would compete for it, and that the two universities would be umpires in the contest. The universities declined the honour, and no one competed that had ever been heard of before. Cave alone marvelled that the remote chance of winning fifty pounds had so little attraction for celebrated men.³ From this instance we may judge of the kind of encouragement which would be offered to the obscure "S. Smith," who appeared not to have a respectable residence, and whose letters were to be left at a public-house in Birmingham.

To escape from the bondage of a school, Johnson had endeavoured to earn a subsistence by his pen. He was anxious now to obtain a situation in a school to escape from starvation. Gilbert Walmesley, registrar of the ecclesiastical court at Lichfield, had very early noticed the remarkable attainments of the old bookseller's son. "He was," says Johnson, "of an advanced age, and I was only a boy; yet he never received my notions with con-

¹ Hawkins's *Life of Johnson*, p. 29; Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 29.

² Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 804. ³ Johnson's *Works*, vol. xii. p. 215.

tempt. I honoured him, and he endured me. His studies had been so various that I am not able to name a man of equal knowledge. Such was his amplitude of learning, and such his copiousness of communication, that it may be doubted whether a day now passes in which I have not some advantage from his friendship.”¹ In this crisis of need Mr. Walmesley endeavoured to render his friendship advantageous in other ways. The mastership of the grammar school of Solihull, in Warwickshire, was vacant in 1735, and on the 13th of August he wrote to one Mr. Greswold, and recommended Johnson for the office. “Before the ffœofees would return an answer,” replied Mr. Greswold, on the 30th of the same month, “they desired some time to make enquiry of the caracter of Mr. Johnson, who all agree that he is an excellent scholar, and on that account deserves much better than to be schoolmaster of Solihull. But then he has the caracter of being a very haughty, ill-natured gent., and that he has such a way of distorting his fface, which, though he can’t help, the gent. think it may affect some young ladds; for these two reasons he is not approved on, the late master Mr. Crumpton’s huffing the ffœofees being stil in their memory.” Mr. Greswold, who, from his spelling and mode of expressing himself, does not appear to have had his own education at the Solihull grammar school, concludes by saying that they “are all exstreamly obliged” to Mr. Walmesley “for proposeing so good a schollar,” though they did not care to avail themselves of his scholarship.² The trustees would naturally consult his former employer at Market Bosworth, and the violent and vindictive Sir Wolstan Dixie was just the man to set the brand of bad temper upon his resentment of the insults and injuries which had been heaped upon him. No one, it must be confessed, would be more likely to

¹ *Lives of the Poets*, vol. ii. p. 57.

² Boswell’s *Johnson*, p. 24, note.

follow the example of Mr. Crumpton, whom, in his *Life of Shenstone*, he calls "an eminent schoolmaster,"¹ if any attempt had been made to encroach on his authority. In the following year he lost a situation, solely from "his way of distorting his face." He applied for the humble post of assistant to Mr. Budworth, the master of the grammar school at Brewood, in Staffordshire, and was rejected from the apprehension that his convulsive movements would excite imitation, or derision, among the boys.² The objection was fanciful. When he was adopted into the family of the Thrales, the children were not seized with muscular twitchings, and, as for ridicule, there was more danger that he would inspire alarm than that he would invite contempt.

The position of Johnson in the spring of 1736 is a notable instance of the helplessness of men who have no settled calling. He was in his twenty-seventh year, an admirable Latin and good Greek scholar, with a vast store of miscellaneous learning, a strong understanding, a logical mind, an imposing style, and a ready pen. To those mental gifts he conjoined unflinching principle and piety. Yet with all his talents and integrity he could not find an outlet for his exertions; and while tens of thousands of commonplace people, who had been brought up to a profession, were earning an easy competence, he wandered a pauper about the world. Throughout this desolate period we are almost entirely ignorant of his history. His life is lost in the obscurity of indigence, and if we could draw aside the veil, it would only reveal a spectacle of misery darker than the darkness which hides it. On the 9th of July, 1736, we are summoned by his marriage to the contemplation of a brighter prospect. He had still to wrestle with misery for many a toilsome day, but it is a relief to catch a momentary glimpse of sunshine amid the clouds which enveloped him as he trod

¹ *Lives of the Poets*, vol. iii. p. 295.

² Nichols's *Literary Anecdotes*, vol. iii. p. 333.

painfully and undauntedly, head and mind erect, along his dreary road.

Few persons felt the power of female attractions more strongly than Johnson. When at school at Stourbridge, "he was much enamoured," says Boswell, "of Olivia Lloyd, a young Quaker."¹ During a visit to Birmingham, in 1776, he told Boswell that his first love was Hector's sister. "It dropped," he said, "out of my head imperceptibly; but she and I shall always have a kindness for each other."² The tourists passed on to Lichfield, and, as they talked of Garrick and players, another early passion was revealed. "Forty years ago, sir," said Johnson, "I was in love with an actress here, Mrs. Emmet, who acted Flora in 'Hob in the Well.'"³ About the same date he was in love with Miss Mary Aston, the daughter of a neighbouring baronet. The acquaintance was formed at the house of Mr. Walmesley, who married her sister, Margaret, in April, 1736. She herself, who owes all her celebrity to the humble admirer whom it would then have been thought condescension in her to notice, fell to the lot of Captain Brodie, of the Royal Navy. "She was a wit and a scholar," said Johnson, "and the loveliest creature I ever saw." When Mr. Thrale asked him which had been the happiest period of his life, he answered the twelvemonth in which "he spent one whole evening with Molly Aston." "That, indeed," he added, "was not happiness,—it was rapture; the thought of it sweetened the whole year."⁴ He has stated of Mr. Walmesley that "he was a Whig with all the virulence and malevolence of his party."⁵ The Astons were of the same political school, and the fascinating Molly declaimed much in favour of liberty, which Johnson turned into a pretty compliment to her charms."⁶

¹ Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 23.

² *Ibid.*, p. 488.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 490.

⁴ *Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 157.

⁵ *Lives of the Poets*, vol. ii. p. 57.

⁶ *Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 157.

Liber ut esse velim, suasisti pulchra Maria,
Ut maneam liber, pulchra Maria, vale !

You have taught me, sweet Mary, to wish to be free ;
That free I may keep, adieu, Mary, to thee !

One of the opinions of this enchantress has been preserved by him in his essay upon Pope's Epitaphs. The poet had said of Mrs. Corbet that she

No arts essayed, but not to be admired,

to which Johnson subjoins, "I once heard a lady of great beauty and excellence object to the line, that it contained an unnatural and incredible panegyric."¹ Miss Aston had experienced its general falsity in the envy which caused her to be disliked by women because she was courted by men.²

Miss Hector became the wife of Mr. Careless, a clergyman, and was a widow when Johnson spent the evening with her at Birmingham, in 1776. The passion which dropped imperceptibly out of his memory could not be very vehement. After an interval, nevertheless, of more than forty years, the traces of his youthful attachment remained. "If I had married her," he said, "it might have been as happy for me." "Pray, sir," enquired Boswell, "do you not suppose that there are fifty women in the world, with any one of whom a man may be as happy as with any one woman in particular?" JOHNSON. "Aye, sir, fifty thousand." BOSWELL. "Then, sir, you are not of opinion with some who imagine that certain men and certain women are made for each other, and that they cannot be happy if they miss their counterparts?" JOHNSON. "To be sure not, sir. I believe marriages would in general be as happy, and often more so, if they were all made by the lord chancellor, upon a due consideration of the characters and circumstances, without the parties having any choice in the matter."³ He added,

¹ *Lives of the Poets*, vol. iii. p. 147.

² *Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 158.

³ Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 488.

a few days later, that "it was commonly a weak man who married for love."¹ Such sentiments might convey the impression that he conceived the wisest marriages to be mere prudential arrangements, in which affection had no share. But this was not his creed, and the semblance of cold calculation in his doctrines was the result of his romantic ideas. In consequence of the extreme defectiveness of his sight, he acknowledged that he had never seen "the human face divine."² From the hints with which he was furnished by nature he drew poetical pictures in his mind, and women who appeared to others ridiculous or repulsive, were in his estimation hardly lower than the angels. This imaginative faculty, which improved defects into beauties, persuaded him that it was as easy to find fifty thousand wives as one. He maintained that there was less danger of falling in love indiscreetly in London than anywhere else; "for there," said he, "the difficulty of deciding between the conflicting pretensions of a vast variety of objects keeps you safe."³ The facility with which he could adore convinced him that if worth existed affection must follow. The fitness of a woman's qualities were therefore, with him, the main point to be secured, and the weakness he condemned in marrying for love was the folly of trusting to the blind emotions of the heart, uncorrected by the sober counsels of the judgment. He was so far from intending to dispense with fondness that "he always alleged that want of tenderness was want of parts, and was no less a proof of stupidity than depravity."⁴

The transforming power of his fancy explains the strangeness of his choice, which would certainly not have been confirmed by the lord chancellor "upon a due consideration of the circumstances." Mrs. Johnson, whose maiden name was Jervis, was born on the 4th of February, 1689, at Great Peatling, in Leicestershire. Her father

¹ Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 495.

² Hawkins's *Life of Johnson*, p. 33.

³ Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 217.

⁴ *Ibid.*

is styled esquire in the baptismal register,¹ and Johnson recorded on her tombstone that the family was ancient.² Her social position was not too high for her to ally herself with Mr. Porter, a mercer at Birmingham. Mr. Hector bought his clothes of him, and introduced Johnson to him, either as an acquaintance or a customer, about 1732.³ Hawkins, who only professes to deliver reports and conjectures, supposes the mercer to have bequeathed his wife eight hundred pounds.⁴ Miss Williams, who had definite information, told Lady Knight that he died insolvent.⁵ The widow was twenty years older than Johnson. Neither her person nor her manners afforded the least compensation for the disparity of years. Mrs. Thrale had seen a portrait of her, which, unless the likeness was flattering, showed that she had once been very pretty.⁶ But at forty-seven her charms had fled. She was a fat woman, with protuberant bosoms, and had swelled cheeks of a florid red, which was in part the effect of cordials, and in part was due to an outer coating of rouge. Her dress was flaring and fantastic, and her behaviour and mode of talking were both affected.⁷ Garrick, from whom this description is derived, pronounced her to be "a little painted puppet, of no value at all."⁸ Johnson saw her with different eyes. Of the four qualifications for marriage which he thought important in the order in which they are named—virtue, wit, beauty, and money⁹—she had all, in his estimation, except the last and least. In his epitaph on her he called her "beautiful, accomplished, ingenious, pious,"¹⁰ and spoke of her in the same strain to Boswell and Mrs. Thrale. Even of her abilities he was an inadequate, because a partial judge. A solitary specimen of her literary opinions, which he quoted in the *Lives of the Poets*, is egregiously

¹ Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 24, note.

² *Ibid.*, p. 78, note.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 24, note.

⁴ Hawkins's *Life of Johnson*, p. 33.

⁵ Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 24, note.

⁶ *Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 148.

⁷ Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 26.

⁸ *Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 148.

⁹ *Apophthegms, etc.*, in Hawkins's ed. of Johnson's *Works*, vol. xi. p. 202.

¹⁰ Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 78, note.

commonplace. "As a poet," he says, speaking of Gay, "he cannot be rated very high. He was, as I once heard a female critic remark, 'of a lower order.'" ¹ His fondness for the person who uttered so insignificant an observation could alone have induced him to commemorate it. He may equally have overestimated her powers of elocution, when he affirmed that "she read comedy better than anybody he ever heard." He admitted that "she mouthed too much in tragedy." ² The testimony of Miss Williams was that "she had a good understanding, and great sensibility of heart, but was inclined to be satirical." ³ "Love and marriage," Johnson wrote to Baretti, in 1762, "are different states. Those who are to suffer evils together, and to suffer often for the sake of one another, soon lose that tenderness of look, and that benevolence of mind, which arose from the participation of unmingled pleasure and successive amusements." ⁴ "Sir," he said to Boswell, who dreaded the superiority of talents in a lady he was wishing to wed, "you need not be afraid. Before a year goes you'll find that reason much weaker, and that wit not so bright." ⁵ But time, and trials, and familiarity did not dissipate the fictitious charms with which the imagination of Johnson had invested his grotesque, painted, dram-drinking, antiquated wife, or diminish, in any obvious degree, the homage which he paid her. Dr. Hawkesworth, who knew her at the close of her life, said that the airs of a beauty, which she continued to exhibit, were answered by an air of profound respect in her husband. ⁶ He could not endure the notion that anybody should succeed to his place in her heart, and he was once on the point of extorting a promise from her not to marry again, but checked the impulse. ⁷

Johnson, on his part, did not seem formed to raise

¹ *Lives of the Poets*, vol. ii. p. 295; *Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 162.

² *Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 147.

³ Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 24, note.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

⁶ Hawkins's *Life of Johnson*, p. 314.

⁷ Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 201.

a passion in female breasts. "His appearance," said his step-daughter, Miss Porter, "was then very forbidding; he was lean and lank, so that his immense structure of bones was hideously striking to the eye, and the scars of the scrofula were deeply visible. His hair was straight and stiff, and separated behind, and his convulsive starts and gesticulations tended to excite at once surprise and ridicule." Mrs. Porter estimated him by the powers of his mind, and not by the disadvantages of his person. "This," she remarked to her daughter, "is the most sensible man that I ever saw in my life."¹ His comparative youth, and intellectual endowments, his admiration of her matronly figure, bloated face, and acted manners, must have had a captivating effect at her mature age, when vanity survived, and the means of gratifying it were gone. The widow of a Birmingham shopkeeper, in reduced circumstances, and forty-seven years old, might well overlook some outward drawbacks in a suitor so ardent and so gifted, and who was in the opening prime of his days. "Sir," he said to Beauclerk, "it was a love-marriage on both sides."² He doubtless appeared to Mrs. Porter, as he did to a lady of Peter Garrick's acquaintance, "a very seducing man."³

His union with the portionless widow promised to improve his circumstances by putting him into a position to earn a livelihood. At the suggestion of Mr. Walmesley, he determined to open a school, and hired a good-sized house for the purpose, in the neighbourhood of Lichfield. With a wife to manage the domestic economy, he might reasonably hope that his learning, seconded by the recommendations of his friends, would procure him pupils.⁴ The prospect was alluring. He was to be raised above need through his entrance into a state which he conceived to be the summit of human felicity. "Life," he said, "has not anything more to be desired than a prudent and

¹ Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 24.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 672, note.

² *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁴ Hawkins's *Life of Johnson*, pp. 35, 36.

virtuous marriage."¹ He has pithily remarked in *Rasselas* that matrimony has many pains, but celibacy has no pleasures;² and he believed that even ill-assorted matches were preferable to cheerless celibacy.³ The gloom which hung upon him in solitude rendered the maxim truer of him than of people in general. The hardships of his necessitous lot were an increased inducement to him to accept immediate ease, at the risk of greater embarrassments in the issue. "It is not from reason and prudence," he said, "that people marry, but from inclination. A man is poor; he thinks, I cannot be worse, and so I'll e'en take Peggy."⁴ Mrs. Porter's time of life diminished the hazards by securing him from the incumbrance of a family. Poverty would not have led him to desire the exemption; but, for weightier reasons, it may have influenced him in selecting a woman in years for his wife. His malady was hereditary. The impending madness he inherited from his father would have been transmitted to his offspring, and he may have shrunk from perpetuating a calamity which he regarded with terror.

The lover went to ask his mother's consent to the match, and Miss Seward professed to retail the brief and singular dialogue which ensued. While Johnson lived, this unprincipled woman had never ventured to attack him openly; but when he was dead she traduced him in some articles in the *Gentleman's Magazine* and in the dreary dissertations, called letters, which she left for posthumous publication. "Sir," said Johnson of her father, who was a canon of Lichfield, "his ambition is to be a fine talker, so he goes to Buxton, and such places, where he may find companies to listen to him. And, sir, he is a valetudinarian, one of those who are always mending themselves. I do not know a more disagreeable character than a valetudinarian, who thinks that he may do anything that is for his ease, and indulges himself in the grossest free-

¹ Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 129.

² *Rasselas*, chap. xxvi.

³ Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 219.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

doms. Sir, he brings himself to the state of a hog in a sty."¹ This contemptuous sketch was necessarily annoying to his daughter, who got Mr. White, a clergyman connected with the cathedral, to assert that her father was a man of robust constitution, refined manners, and easy conversation.² The lady had slights of her own to resent. The pretentiousness, pedantry, and affectation, which disgust in her writings, must have been odious to Johnson, who spoke of her in language which Boswell suppressed, though he feared from her rancour that it had reached her ears by report.³ He retained, on the other hand, a compliment with which the oracle had replied to her mention of Madame du Bocage's epic, the *Columbiade*: "Madam, there is not anything equal to your description of the sea round the North Pole, in your Ode on the death of Captain Cook."⁴ But, besides that this was very equivocal praise, Sir Brooke Boothby declared, from personal knowledge, that the larger part of the ode was composed or remodelled by Dr. Darwin,⁵ and she must secretly have felt it to be an aggravation of Johnson's general censure that the single piece he commended owed its beauties to another hand. There was yet a deeper cause of offence than the wound to her morbid literary vanity. She had formed an improper attachment for one of the cathedral singing men, and the dean and his family were obliged to cease visiting her. Dr. Percy conjectured that Johnson had reproved her for her conduct.⁶ He at least forbade Mrs. Thrale to speak to her at Lichfield in 1774, before the scandal was at its height.⁷ Hence her ravings against his malignity, while acknowledging his talents, and her accusation that "his veracity was too often the victim of his malevolent passions," which is as false of him as it was true of herself.

¹ Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 545.

² Nichols's *Illustrations of Literature*, vol. vii. p. 363.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. vii. p. 350.

⁴ Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 773.

⁵ Nichols's *Illustrations of Literature*, vol. vii. p. 216.

⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. viii. p. 428.

⁷ Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 415, note.

Her invectives were rendered harmless by her childish imbecility, and might in some degree be excused by the vexations which prompted them. Her disgrace is that, the better to gratify her malice, she had recourse to invention. "As my book," says Boswell, "was to be a real history, and not a novel, it was necessary to suppress all erroneous particulars, however entertaining. I was therefore obliged to reduce into a very narrow compass indeed, what Miss Seward's fluent pen had expanded over many sheets." Part of the little he preserved was subsequently discovered to be as unfounded as the mass he cast aside at the outset.

The second wife of her grandfather Hunter was the sister of Porter, the Birmingham mercer. Miss Seward related that Porter's daughter was on a visit to her aunt, in Johnson's school-days, that Johnson fell in love with her, that she was the heroine of the lines, "To a lady, on receiving from her a sprig of myrtle," that the girl regarded him with aversion, and that even his "beautiful verses could not teach her to endure him."¹ Johnson assured Mrs. Thrale and Mr. Nichols that the verses were an almost extempore effusion, written at the request of Mr. Hector, who wanted them for a friend, and when Miss Seward, upon discovering that the real history of the piece was known, endeavoured to prop up her fable, Mr. Hector came forward, and confirmed the account of Mrs. Thrale.² Not a syllable of the poetical tribute was composed till several years after the date assigned to the pretended passion for Miss Porter. Having endeavoured to cast additional ridicule upon Johnson's choice, by representing that he had been enamoured of the daughter before he offered to the mother, Miss Seward went on to describe the interview in which he asked the consent of old Mrs. Johnson to his marriage. "No, Sam," she said, or was made to say, "my willing consent you will never have to

¹ Nichols's *Illustrations of Literature*, vol. vii. p. 325.

² *Ibid.*, vol. vii. p. 347, note; *Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 34; Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 24, note.

so preposterous a union. You are not twenty-five, and she is turned fifty. If she had any prudence this request had never been made to me. Where are your means of subsistence? Porter has died poor in consequence of his wife's expensive habits. You have great talents, but as yet have turned them into no profitable channel." "Mother, I have not deceived Mrs. Porter. I have told her the worst of me,—that I am of mean extraction, that I have no money, and that I have had an uncle hanged. She replied that she valued no one more or less for his descent, that she had no more money than myself, and that though she had not had a relation hanged, she had fifty who deserved hanging."¹ For the story of Johnson's attachment to his step-daughter, Miss Seward referred to her mother, who was dead, and Miss Porter, who was dying.² Neither of them could be interrogated, and her own propensity to falsehood relieves them from the suspicion of having originated the deception. The person, she said, who related to her the startling sequel to her tale was Johnson's familiar friend, Mrs. Cobb, the daughter of an apothecary, and the widow of a mercer at Lichfield. The accurate Boswell thought it necessary to verify the statement. He wrote to Mrs. Cobb, and received for answer that she never recollected to have heard a word on the subject.³ Her contradiction evidently got round to Miss Seward, and, in her controversy with Boswell, she prepared a way for retreat. She protested she had forgotten whether she had quoted any evidence for the conversation, that to the best of her remembrance she was told it by the late Mrs. Cobb, that she could not, however, be certain from whom the anecdote was derived, but that it was frequently repeated, and generally credited in the place.⁴ Boswell responded by printing an extract from the letter of Mrs. Cobb,⁵ and then it became apparent

¹ Nichols's *Illustrations of Literature*, vol. vii. p. 325.

² *Ibid.*, vol. vii. pp. 322, 345.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. vii. 359.

⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. vii. p. 352.

⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. vii. p. 359.

that Miss Seward's appeal to the current belief was quite as unfortunate as her reference to an individual witness, since an extraordinary passage in Johnson's local history, which had been the common talk of Lichfield for fifty years, had never penetrated to a lady who resided there all her life, and was intimate alike with himself and his connections. If the rumour ever circulated, it was after it had been propagated by Miss Seward, who had next recourse to the not unusual artifice of citing her dupes as her authorities. The dialogue carries with it internal evidence of fabrication. The main incident was palpably fictitious. The crime, the criminal, the trial, the place of execution, were not known to anyone, and the folly of the retort betrays the feeble mimicry of the reporter. Mrs. Johnson objects that the marriage is rash, because her son has still his fortune to make in the world, and because Mrs. Porter is old, imprudent, and extravagant. Johnson, who was always noted for grappling closely with his antagonist, takes no notice of her arguments, but answers by recapitulating irrelevant and degrading family particulars,—by telling her that the fact of her own, or her husband's brother, having been hanged has been repeated to Mrs. Porter, and that Mrs. Porter has assured him in return that her relations deserved hanging. To represent Johnson as bearing testimony to circumstances which might lower him, was the obvious motive for the gross and clumsy invention. Miss Seward's hostility to his memory was notorious in Lichfield, and though Boswell forebore to mention her name when he addressed his enquiries to Mrs. Cobb, she remarked in her reply, "If you praise our good Johnson, Miss Seward will not love you."¹

The request of Johnson to his mother to sanction the engagement was merely a form of respect, for he thought that submission could not be demanded of children whose dependence had ceased. He ridiculed the praise which

¹ Nichols's *Illustrations of Literature*, vol. vii. p. 359.

Xenophon and Rollin bestowed upon the victorious Cyrus for asking leave of Cambyses to wed a neighbouring princess. "If Cyrus," he said, "by his conquests had not purchased emancipation, he had conquered to little purpose indeed. Can you forbear to see the folly of a fellow, who has in his care the lives of thousands, when he begs his papa's permission to be married, and confesses his inability to decide in a matter which concerns no man's happiness but his own?"¹ He held kindred language to an early Lichfield companion, Mr. Simpson. He was a barrister who had made an improvident match, against the wishes of his father, and Johnson declared he was "amazed" that the act should be resented. "If," he urged, "you married imprudently, you miscarried at your own hazard, at an age when you had a right of choice. It would be hard if a man might not choose his own wife, who has a right to plead before the judges of his country."² Mrs. Johnson, in secret, was not much better pleased than Mr. Simpson the elder. She was convinced that to marry an old, impoverished widow, was indiscreet, and she only acquiesced without remonstrance, from deference to the fervent wishes of the lover, and from fear of his temper if he was opposed.³ Mrs. Porter owed obedience to nobody, nor could anyone dispute that she was "at an age when she had a right of choice"; but she had grown-up sons, who did not conceal their disgust.⁴ The difference of years, the poverty of the bridegroom, the repulsiveness of his exterior, the oddity of his manners, were visible to those who had no perception of the greatness which redeemed incongruities and defects.

The covert disapproval of Johnson's family at Lichfield, and the open hostility of Mrs. Porter's relatives at Birmingham, may have been the reason that a neutral place was selected for the wedding. It was settled that

¹ *Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 27.

² Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 117.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 25, note.

the ceremony should be performed at Derby, and on the morning of the 9th of July, 1736, this singular pair rode thither on horseback. "Sir," said Johnson, when describing to Boswell the behaviour of the bride, "she had read the old romances, and had got into her head the fantastical notion that a woman of spirit should use her lover like a dog. So, sir, at first she told me that I rode too fast, and she could not keep up with me; and, when I rode a little slower, she passed me, and complained that I lagged behind. I was not to be made the slave of caprice, and I resolved to begin as I meant to end. I therefore pushed on briskly, till I was fairly out of sight. The road lay between two hedges, so that I was sure she could not miss it, and I contrived that she should soon come up with me. When she did, I observed her to be in tears."¹ The determination of the elderly widow to regulate her manners by the old romances shows that Garrick did not exaggerate when he accused her of affectation. That a fat and painted woman of forty-seven should have had the vanity and childishness to conceive the scheme, is only rivalled by the absurdity of supposing that, at her years, she could have influence to enforce her coquettish whims upon a young and strong-minded man. There is another incident belonging to their matrimonial history which once more caused her to cry. The admiration of Johnson for the beautiful Molly Aston was no secret in Lichfield. His wife was jealous of the attachment, and one day meeting a gipsy, as they were walking in the country with two or three acquaintances, she bid the fortune-teller look at her husband's hand. The christian name of Mrs. Johnson was Elizabeth, and the woman, who had previously learnt her lesson, replied, "Your heart is divided, sir, between a Betty and a Molly: Betty loves you best, but you take most delight in Molly's company." Johnson turned about to laugh at this echo of the idle

¹ Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 25.

gossip of the town, and saw that poor Betty, who found in the oracular announcement a confirmation of her misgivings, had burst into tears. "Pretty charmer," said Johnson, in repeating the anecdote, "she had no reason."¹ The "pretty charmer" was probably fifty; but the expression is an evidence how gently he felt towards her, and that he never ceased to view her with the eyes of a lover.

The new academy was advertised in the Gentleman's Magazine of June and July, 1736. "At Edial, near Lichfield, in Staffordshire, young gentlemen are boarded, and taught the Latin and Greek languages, by Samuel Johnson." There was nothing to denote to the public that Samuel Johnson was a proper guardian, or a competent instructor. He was without a degree, he was not in Orders, and his name was not attached to any learned or literary work. His unpretending announcement had no attraction for strangers, and pupils did not come in. Hawkins says that there were never more than eight, and that part of them were day-boys. Boswell states that there were only three, and these were from a couple of local families,—Mr. Offely, the son of a Staffordshire gentleman of fortune, and George and David Garrick, the sons of a half-pay captain at Lichfield.² The Garricks were sent by the recommendation of Mr. Walmesley.³ David was now in his twenty-first year. His head was already full of the stage, he had no taste for classical pursuits, and when his master expected exercises the scholar brought him some scenes of a comedy.⁴ A man who is much above his work is hardly more efficient than when he falls below it, and Johnson was ill adapted for a preceptor of unwilling learners. He communicated results, but not the process by which the results were

¹ *Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 158.

² Hawkins's *Life of Johnson*, p. 36; Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 25.

³ Hawkins's *Life of Johnson*, p. 35.

⁴ Davies's *Life of Garrick*, vol. i. p. 8.

obtained. He was too impetuous to advance by slow and regular gradations, and was irritated by ignorance which he had not the patience to remove or endure.¹ His pupils were more amused by his peculiarities than edified by his genius. His strange contortions were a constant theme for secret mirth, and they used to listen at his door, and peep through the keyhole, that they might be diverted by what Boswell calls "his tumultuous and awkward fondness for Mrs. Johnson."² The academy had but a brief existence. The terms must have been low, for the Garricks were poor, and "their study," as Johnson said, "was to make fourpence do as much as others made fourpence halfpenny do."³ Unless the numbers increased, the profits were insufficient to defray the cost of his establishment. He could not afford to prolong a losing experiment, and he would have been the readier to recognise its failure that his occupation was distasteful to him, and that he had been maturing loftier plans in the interval. At the end of six months⁴ he abandoned the task of teaching the three youths, and resolved to try if he would be accepted for a teacher of mankind.

Johnson had begun to realise the extent of his capacity, and he now aspired to be something more than an editor and translator of other men's labours, or the anonymous compiler of small articles for the Gentleman's Magazine. He was engaged upon a play, in which success would not only satisfy his present needs, but would rank him at once among the eminent writers of his time. Hawkins plausibly conjectures that Garrick incited him to the attempt.⁵ The piece was commenced while this theatrical enthusiast was

¹ Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 25; Davies's *Life of Garrick*, vol. i. p. 7.

² Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 26.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 629.

⁴ Davies's *Life of Garrick*, vol. i. p. 8. Davies had his information from Johnson himself. Boswell says that the Edial Academy was kept up for "a year and a half"; but his own dates show clearly that the expression is a misprint, or a slip of the pen, and that the correct reading is "half a year."

⁵ Hawkins's *Life of Johnson*, p. 40.

under his charge ; and at the same time that the sprightly pupil was at work on a comedy, the sententious master was composing a tragedy. He took the groundwork of his plot from Knolles's History of the Turks, which he borrowed of Peter Garrick, the eldest brother of David. When he had finished three acts he read them to Mr. Walmesley, who objected that the distresses of the heroine had already reached their climax, and that no resource was left for sustaining the interest to the end. "How," he said, "can you possibly contrive to plunge her into deeper calamity?" The ecclesiastical tribunal, in which Mr. Walmesley held his office, was reputed to be arbitrary and oppressive in its proceedings, and Johnson replied, "Sir, I can put her into the Spiritual Court."¹ The criticism of Mr. Walmesley was, in fact, a commendation ; and, encouraged by his praises, the author determined to go up to London, and trust to literature for a livelihood.

He was accompanied by Garrick. The future actor was designed for the law, and it was intended that he should complete his liberal education before he became immersed in professional drudgery. He was too old for a school, and the half-pay captain could not afford to maintain him at college. Mr. Walmesley had an early friend, Mr. Colson, who was master of the free school at Rochester, and whom he held in such estimation that he protested it would be his ambition to put a son of his own under his care, in place of sending him to the University.² He wrote to this gentleman, and begged that Garrick might be received as a private pupil. He said that the captain was an honest and valuable person, and that David was very sensible, and a good scholar. "I have proposed," he continued, "your taking him, if you like well of it, and your boarding him, and instructing him in the mathematics, philosophy, and human learning. He is now nineteen, of sober and good disposition, and is as ingenious and promis-

¹ Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 27.

² Davies's *Life of Garrick*, vol. i. p. 11.

ing a young man as ever I knew in my life. Few instructions on your side will do, and in the intervals of study he will be an agreeable companion to you.”¹ The ingenuity and the promise would not have seemed less because a couple of years had been deducted from his age. The request was granted. “He and another neighbour of mine, one Mr. Johnson,” wrote Mr. Walmesley to Mr. Colson, on March 2, 1737, “set out this morning for London together. Davy Garrick is to be with you early the next week, and Mr. Johnson to try his fate with a tragedy, and to see to get himself employed in some translation, either from the Latin or the French. Johnson is a very good scholar and poet, and I have great hopes will turn out a fine tragedy writer. If it should any ways lay in your power, [I] doubt not but you would be ready to recommend and assist your countryman.”² The travellers made the journey on horseback, and in playful exaggeration of their poverty, Garrick once remarked in Boswell’s hearing, “We rode and tied.” “That was the year,” observed Johnson at a dinner-party, “when I came to London with twopence halfpenny in my pocket.” “Eh, what do you say?” exclaimed Garrick, “with twopence halfpenny in your pocket?” “Why, yes,” replied Johnson, “when I came with twopence halfpenny in my pocket, and thou, Davy, with three halfpence in thine.”³ The Rabbins are reported to respect the smallest piece of paper, lest it should have written upon it words of wisdom. The instance of these two men is a lesson to extend the rule to human beings. Who that could have seen them entering the city, moneyless and friendless, would have suspected that one was to be the greatest author, and the other the greatest actor, of his age?

“I have the pleasure,” said Mr. Walmesley in his first letter to Mr. Colson, “of hearing of you sometimes in the prints, and am glad to see you daily throwing in your

¹ Davies’s *Life of Garrick*, vol. i. p. 10.

² *Ibid.*, p. 11.

³ Boswell’s *Johnson*, p. 27, note.

valuable contributions to the republic of letters.”¹ His connection with the Press was the means by which he was expected “to recommend and assist” an unknown man of talent, from the common county, who had gone a stranger to London, in the hope of living by his pen. But Mr. Colson had defects which were stronger than his local and literary sympathies. The name of Gelidus, under which Johnson sketched his character in the *Rambler*,² is expressive of his cold, apathetic disposition. He is represented as a man absorbed in scientific researches till he had “totally divested himself of all human sensations, and was unmoved by every spectacle of distress, and the loudest call of social nature.” He received a letter from a shipwrecked brother, who was naked and destitute in a foreign land. “Naked and destitute!” repeated Gelidus, and having exhausted his compassion in the exclamation, he ordered his brother’s account of the wind to be noted in the diary of the weather. His family broke into his study, and announced to him that a neighbouring town was in flames, which were rapidly spreading from house to house. “What you tell me,” he said, “is very probable, for fire naturally acts in a circle.” Abstracted from his species, he partook neither of their joys nor sorrows, had no ear for complaints, and no leisure for interference.³ Whether Johnson had gathered these traits on a visit during one of those periods in which his history is a blank to us, or had obtained his information from Mr. Walmesley and Garrick, it is clear that, if he ever invoked the good offices of the schoolmaster, he applied to him in vain. Garrick would have fared better. Mr. Colson was more zealous as a tutor than as a friend, and readily imparted the knowledge he sacrificed all other duties to acquire. But David’s purpose was frustrated for the present. He entered his name at Lincoln’s Inn on March 9,⁴ and

¹ Davies’s *Life of Garrick*, vol. i. p. 9.

² *Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 49.

³ *The Rambler*, No. 24.

⁴ Davies’s *Life of Garrick*, vol. i. p. 13.

lingered in London till his money was spent. The little fund which Johnson took with him was likewise gone, and Garrick suggested that they should ask a loan of Mr. Wilcox, a bookseller, with whom he had a distant acquaintance. The worthy man listened to their artless tale, and advanced them five pounds.¹ Johnson regarded the literary calling with youthful enthusiasm, and when he first saw St. John's Gate, where the Gentleman's Magazine was printed, "he beheld it with reverence."² He now told Wilcox that his intention was to get his livelihood as an author. Wilcox eyed attentively his powerful frame, and, with a significant look, said, "You had better buy a porter's knot."³ Such are the different colours in which objects appear to hope and experience. He had not long to wait before he too well understood the meaning of the bookseller's warning gesture and advice.

The expectation of advancing by rapid strides from want and obscurity to plenty and fame is the delusive dream which has cheated thousands. Instead of mounting to ease and consideration, Johnson found himself a member of a wretched and discredited community. For the few authors who are familiar to the world, there are myriads whose names were never heard beyond their private circle. They have swarmed from the hour when printing and reading became common; but as Pope and his contemporaries were the first to drag the tribe of underlings into public view, they are often assumed to have had their rise in his time. Their numbers had merely increased with the demand. Swift, in his "Hospital for Incurables," calculates that provision must be made "for at least forty thousand incurable scribblers," and adds, with his usual savage satire, "that if there were not great reason to hope that many of that class would properly be admitted among the incurable fools, he should strenuously intercede to have the number increased by ten or

¹ Hawkins's *Life of Johnson*, p. 43.

² Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 31.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 28, note.

twenty thousand more."¹ Those who reflect upon the prodigious mass of printed matter, beyond all power of computation, which is daily issued to the world, must perceive how small a part of it can be the production of learning and talent. In the last century the "author-lings," as he termed them, are stated by Smollett to have been the refuse of the usual professions;² and the accurate Johnson himself testifies "that they had seldom any claim to their trade, except that they had tried some other without success."³ No talent, Fielding says, was required beyond that of the writing-master,—not even the knowledge of spelling,—and no stock-in-trade beyond a pen, a little ink, and a small quantity of paper.⁴ "They were men," said Goldsmith, "who, had they been bred cobblers, would all their lives have only mended shoes, and never made them."⁵ Ignorance, which would have been helpless if it had stood alone, was rendered marketable by impudence. In Smollett's description of some of the fraternity—characters which are known to have been taken from living representatives—the youth who has been expelled from the University for atheism, and prosecuted for a blasphemer, writes a refutation of the infidelity of Bolingbroke; the Scotchman teaches pronunciation; the cockney, who has never seen a field of wheat, compiles a treatise on agriculture; and the debtor publishes travels in Europe and part of Asia, without having set foot beyond the liberties of the King's Bench.⁶ "The translators," Lintot told Pope, "were the saddest pack of rogues in the world, and in a hungry fit would swear they understood all the languages in the universe."⁷ It was not uncommon for them to furnish versions without comprehending one

¹ Swift's *Works*, ed. Walter Scott, vol. ix. p. 535.

² *Humphry Clinker*, Letter of June 10.

³ *The Rambler*, No. 145.

⁴ *The Covent Garden Journal*, No. 51.

⁵ *Vicar of Wakefield*, chap. xx.

⁶ *Humphry Clinker*, Letter of June 10.

⁷ Pope to Lord Burlington. [Pope's *Works*, vol. x. p. 208.]

syllable of the original. The deceptions were endless. Some of the tribe, when excluded from the world in prisons, invented news for the journals; some affixed to their trash the names of popular authors, or put forth second parts of popular books. An Irishman, mentioned by Smollett, wrote a pamphlet in vindication of the minister of the day; and being disappointed of the place or pension which he expected would reward his zeal, he published an answer, in which he assumed that the writer of the first pamphlet was the minister himself, and addressed him throughout as "your lordship," with such solemn assurance that the politicians were deceived, and devoured "the flimsy reveries of an ignorant garreteer" as a controversy between the premier and the leader of the opposition.¹ Men who had obtained a little notoriety fathered, for a gratuity, the productions of obscurer scribes. Griffiths, the proprietor of the *Lives of the Poets*, which were chiefly compiled by Robert Shiels, contracted with no less contemptible a person than Theophilus Cibber, "that his name should be made use of as the author of the said work, and be inserted accordingly in the title-page thereof, and in many advertisements relative to it."² That Theophilus Cibber, for the sake of a few guineas, should be willing to practise a fraud, is no addition to his infamy; but that a thriving publisher should have thought it worth his while to be guilty of the imposture, is a proof how low must have been the morality of the trade, when honesty could be sacrificed for such a pitiful advantage. A bookseller is represented by Goldsmith as calling upon the Mandarin, who is the assumed author of the *Citizen of the World*. "Sir," said the bookseller, after some preliminary conversation, "it is time that I should come to business. I have just now in the press a history of China, and if you will put your name to it as the author, I shall repay the obligation with gratitude." "What, sir," replied

¹ *Humphry Clinker*.

² Cunningham, in Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*, vol. ii. p. 329, note.

the Mandarin, "put my name to a work which I have not written! Never, while I retain a proper respect for the public and myself."¹ The incident was real, though the particular instance was feigned. Many of the practices of the poor penman were only modes of beggary. A fee of ten or twenty guineas was regularly demanded for dedications, which from a tribute of merit had grown to be a traffic where flattery was bartered for money. Every occurrence in life, which could be converted into a subject of congratulation or condolence, was seized upon by scribblers, who endeavoured to force upon benevolence and vanity the goods which were worthless in the market of the world. When rich people married, they were complimented with epithalamiums; when they died, the sorrowing relatives were assailed with elegies. Goldsmith describes a poetaster welcoming a duke, on his return from his travels, in a strain of panegyric which the writer was persuaded would have "wheedled milk from a mouse." He received a large packet in return, and, instead of the expected bank bills, it contained six copies of verses, each longer than his own, which had been addressed to his grace on the same occasion.² The mendicancy constantly degenerated into swindling. Authors sold tickets for prospective benefit nights, when a play should be performed which was not accepted, and often not composed. More frequently still, they eked out a subsistence by the aid of subscriptions to books which never appeared. Savage was supported for years upon the payments he solicited for a promised collection of his poems. He spent the money as fast as it was received, and omitted to send a single line to the press.³ Others levied contributions for works of which the title-page was the only part they had written, or intended to write. Cooke, the translator of Hesiod, lived for twenty years upon a projected translation

¹ Goldsmith's *Works*, ed. Cunningham, vol. ii. p. 258.

² *Ibid.*, vol. ii. p. 185.

³ Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*, vol. ii. p. 416.

of Plautus.¹ In the Vicar of Wakefield we have a scholar introduced, who had subsisted comfortably for twelve years upon proposals for an edition of Propertius. When this worthy obtained a subscription, he displayed his gratitude by resolving to dedicate the work to his benefactor, and requested that the dedication fee might be paid in advance. When the second demand was conceded, he put forth a third, and applied for money to procure an engraving of his patron's coat of arms,—an adornment which figures in numerous volumes of the time.² These methods were too easy not to be general. "Scarcely a morning passes," says Goldsmith, "that proposals are not thrust into the half-opening doors of the rich, with perhaps a paltry petition showing the author's wants, but not his merits."³ The nuisance grew intolerable, and people of rank bound themselves to one another to forfeit a considerable sum if they ever purchased a ticket, or subscribed to a book. Johnson, Goldsmith, and Fielding have all mentioned this strange defensive alliance of the wealthy against the clamorous importunity of the pauper portion of the literary republic.⁴

The deplorable circumstances of the Grub Street manufacturers must silence censure on the expedients they adopted in their distress. Johnson repeated to Boswell the lines in which Virgil describes the entrance to hell. "Now," said he, "almost all these apply exactly to an author; all these are the concomitants of a printing-house."⁵ Woeful, indeed, must have been the calling which combined the horrors the poet had accumulated to characterise the infernal regions,—the toil, the grief, the revengeful cares, the apprehensions, the hunger, the poverty, the diseases, the sad old age, and the miserable death. In a letter to an Irish friend, in 1758, Goldsmith mentions that "he is in a garret, writing for bread, and

¹ Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 274.

² Goldsmith's *Works*, vol. i. p. 389.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. ii. p. 41.

⁴ *Joseph Andrews*, book iii. chap. iii.

⁵ Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 372.

expecting to be dunned for a milk score.”¹ This was the best estate to which the vast majority of his brethren attained, lucky if they had a garret to shelter them, and bread to eat, and were only dunned for the luxurious superfluity of milk. Many of them were without a roof to their heads. Savage passed his nights in the mean lodging-houses kept open for beggars, or he caroused in cellars, frequented by the lowest of the rabble, who were vile in their language, profligate in their habits, and filthy in their persons. Constantly his finances did not permit him to purchase this cheap and degrading accommodation, and his bed was in winter the ashes of a glasshouse, and in summer the projecting stall of a shop.² One of his reasons for staying till unseasonable hours at the parties to which he was invited, and exhausting the kindness of his entertainers, was that he had no other home than the street. The necessities of Savage were the consequence of his wastefulness. Multitudes shared his indigence who had no opportunity of imitating his extravagance. Among the followers of Smollett was a genius who wrote novels for five pounds a volume; and, being reduced to the fragments of a pair of shoes, he exhibited his wit in a stratagem for running away with his bookseller’s boots. The bookseller was anxious to discover the lodgings of the thief, and was told that this was the only secret the novelist ever kept. His place of rest was believed to be the portico of St. Martin’s Church and similar public situations.³ Like him, the houseless rovers of the fraternity had often pride enough to be anxious to conceal their condition. “Sir,” said Johnson to Boswell, “I honour Derrick for his presence of mind. One night when Floyd, another poor author, was wandering about the streets, he found Derrick fast asleep upon a bulk. Upon being suddenly waked, Derrick started up: ‘My

¹ Forster’s *Life of Goldsmith*, 5th ed., vol. i. p. 140.

² Johnson’s *Lives of the Poets*, vol. ii. p. 410.

³ *Humphry Clinker*.

dear Floyd, I am sorry to see you in this destitute state; will you go home with me to my lodgings?"¹ The invitation he gave in his confusion seems to have arisen more from absence than presence of mind, for, as Mr. Croker observes, "the proposal would naturally have been accepted, and Derrick would have been doubly exposed." It is not probable that the device had even a momentary success. No man with a lodging spent his night by choice upon a bulk. There was a lower depth yet. The arrests were incessant, and the victims had to submit to the humiliation of being conveyed in the custody of extortioners to the dens called sponging-houses. These are defined by Johnson, in his Dictionary, to be the receptacles to which debtors are taken before commitment to prison, where the bailiffs sponge upon them, or riot at their cost. Because a man was too poor to discharge his debts, he had to feed the rapacity of the officers of injustice. Cooped up in bare, dilapidated tenements, the captives had to buy the commonest necessities of life at an exorbitant price, and the bailiff expected besides to share the drink which he sold for his gain. An application of Boyse, the poet, to Cave, dated from the "Debtor's Hell, commonly termed a Sponging-house," discloses the treatment to which persons were exposed who had the misfortune to be caught with empty pockets. He had been two days in confinement, and had not tasted food. A bed, which by custom ought to have been paid for beforehand, had been allowed him on credit, and, unless he could satisfy the demand, the bailiff had declared his intention of detaining his clothes. "So that," said Boyse, in conclusion, "I must go into prison naked, which is too shocking to think of."² The seizure of penniless wretches, when not dictated by revenge, was instigated by the expectation that their friends would come to their aid, and save them from the last extremity

¹ Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 155.

² Hawkins's *Life of Johnson*, p. 159, note.

of a jail. Even a jail was sometimes an enviable retreat. "I have enjoyed," said Ockley, the Arabic scholar, in 1717, when incarcerated for debt in Cambridge Castle, "more true liberty, more happy leisure, and more sober repose in six months here, than in thrice the same number of years before."¹ "I enjoy myself," said Savage, when, in 1743, he was put into Bristol Newgate for a coffee-house bill, "with much more tranquillity than I have known for upwards of a twelvemonth past, having a room entirely to myself, and pursuing the amusement of my poetical studies uninterrupted, and agreeable to my mind."² But these were provincial prisons, in which there was more space, cleanliness, and humanity, than in the metropolitan dungeons. There the inmates were huddled together in close, dark, pestilential caverns, and were compelled to endure the foul talk, and brutal manners, of the lowest of mankind. "I am afraid," says Johnson, in his essay upon imprisonment for debt, "that my conjecture is too near the truth when I suppose that the corrosion of resentment, the heaviness of sorrow, the corruption of confined air, the want of exercise and sometimes of food, the contagion of diseases from which there is no retreat, and the severity of tyrants against whom there can be no resistance, put an end every year to the life of one in four of those that are shut up from the common comforts of human life."³ In this way he computed that there perished annually five thousand debtors, and not a few of the number were literary men.

It was part of the infelicity of the authors that their occasional luck seldom brought relief; for poverty was with them the parent of profusion. Men, as Johnson remarks, are tempted to squander the gifts of chance in the hope of their repetition.⁴ The proceeds of the writers being accidental,

¹ Nichols's *Literary Anecdotes*, p. 251, note.

² Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*, vol. ii. p. 434.

³ *The Idler*, No. 38.

⁴ Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*, vol. ii. p. 372.

they were prone to spend in the lump the casual sums they begged or earned. Their long fits of abstinence, their coarse and scanty food, their depression of body and mind, begot an immoderate craving for the gratifications of appetite, and enticed them to alternate the frugal fare of the hermit with the wines and viands of the epicure. "They knew luxury," says Macaulay, "they knew beggary; but they never knew comfort."¹ While Savage received a pension of fifty pounds a year from the Queen, he invariably disappeared on pay-day, and after a short revel in unknown haunts, he emerged without a penny from the secret scene of his brief debaucheries. He never hesitated to purchase the pleasures of a night by the anguish of cold and hunger for a week.² Shocked as Boyse affected to be at going naked into jail, he at all times preferred sensuality to clothes. When unable to get up for want of a single article of apparel, he expended the last half-guinea of a gratuity on ketchup, truffles, and mushrooms, to eat with his beef.³ His sheets followed his raiment, and with no other covering than a blanket, in which he had cut a hole for his arm, he sat up in bed to write for the booksellers.⁴

Johnson, on one occasion, gathered together money to redeem the clothes of the gluttonous prodigal. "This," said his benefactor, "was when my acquaintances were few, and most of them as poor as myself. The sum was collected by sixpences, when to me sixpence was a serious consideration."⁵ In two days the clothes were again with the pawnbroker. As a substitute for a shirt he wore collars and wristbands of paper, and thus attired, says his biographer, "he frequently appeared abroad, with the additional inconvenience of want of breeches." Visiting

¹ Macaulay's *Essays*, 1 vol. ed., p. 170.

² Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*, vol. ii. pp. 405, 372.

³ *Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 120.

⁴ Cibber's *Lives of the Poets*, vol. v. p. 169. The Life of Boyse was written by Robert Shiels, and Johnson supplied him with the information.

⁵ Nichols's *Literary Anecdotes*, vol. ix. p. 777; Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 805.

his printer in this undress he found some females in the room, who were compelled by modesty to retire in haste.¹ The payments which he gleaned under the name of subscriptions to his poems, and the alms which he extracted under the pretence that he was dying, went not to relieve his pressing necessities, but were lavished on costly suppers at taverns.² His end was in keeping with his life. In May, 1749, he was brought home intoxicated to his obscure lodging, and it was inferred from his appearance that he had been run over by a coach. He died without being able to explain the catastrophe, and was buried by the parish among the common beggars.³ Savage and Boyse were extreme examples of the improvidence which, in a less exaggerated form, was a usual frailty of authors, and embittered the inevitable evils of their trade. Those who were not spendthrifts from the unappeasable passion for low indulgences, were eager at least to escape from care, and endeavoured to drown their misery in wine. Their drunkenness was fostered by the habits imposed on them by their poverty. Without the means to entertain company, or a decent apartment in which to receive it, their meeting-places were at taverns, where they commonly paid for their accommodation by the liquor they consumed.

As if it was not sufficient to be scouted and derided by the rest of mankind, the world of authorship was torn to pieces by intestine factions, and each man did his best to bring his brethren into contempt.

Beasts of all kinds their fellows spare—
Bear lives at amity with bear.

But the literary bears saw rivals in their fellows instead of allies. Bishop Hare wrote to Warburton, in 1736, that nothing had hurt critics so much in the esteem of the public as their ill-treatment of one another.⁴ "The state of authorship, whatever that of nature is," said Warburton

¹ Cibber's *Lives of the Poets*, vol. v. p. 169. ² *Ibid.*, pp. 170, 168.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 173; Nichols's *Literary Anecdotes*, vol. ix. p. 777.

⁴ [Dec. 4, 1736; Watson's *Life of Warburton*, p. 61.]

himself in 1774, "is certainly a state of war, in which every man's hand is set, not against his enemy, but his brother."¹ A painter once confessed to Johnson that no professor of the art ever loved a person who pursued the same craft.² Envy is a common concomitant of vanity, even where there is no direct emulation; and people are found base enough to hate rising merit for no other reason than because it is rising. The passion was sure, therefore, to operate with great intensity among a class, the nature of whose calling made them candidates both for bread and praise, and who believed that every crumb of either which was bestowed upon their brethren of the quill was so much subtracted from themselves. Swift, Johnson, Smollett—all the geniuses who were familiar with the scribbling race—were thus led to regard envy as among the most corrupting and widespread of vices; and, in the opinion of Fielding, it was the reason why there were no worse men than bad writers. "The malice I bore this fellow," the great novelist makes a poet say of a contemporary poet, "is inconceivable to any but an author, and an unsuccessful one. I never could bear to hear him well spoken of, and I writ anonymous satires against him, though I had received obligations from him."³ The whole clan of underlings who fed at the table of Smollett, and existed by his patronage, traduced his character and abused his works; and, as they were no less treacherous to one another than to their benefactor, each was eager to betray the rest to him. Some, even of those who had attained to fame, are reported by Johnson to have employed the meanest artifices to degrade their superiors and keep down their followers.⁴

¹ [Warburton's *Remarks on several occasional Reflections, etc.*, Part i.; *Works*, 1811, vol. xi. p. 232.]

² ["It was a notion held by Sir Joshua, and which I have heard him declare, that it was impossible for two painters in the same department of the art to continue long in friendship with each other."—Northcote's *Life of Reynolds*, vol. ii. p. 238.]

³ [Fielding's *Journey from this World to the next*, book xviii. chap. xxiv.]

⁴ [*The Rambler*, No. 94.]

The jealousy which troubled Goldsmith was in a great degree due to his having been trained in this unhappy school. If a distinction was to be made where almost all were malignant, the critic was entitled to the bad pre-eminence. Swift had defined him to be "a discoverer and collector of faults,"—one who made it his business "to drag out lurking errors, like Cacus from his den, to multiply them like Hydra's heads, and rake them together like Augeas's dung." The detractors swarmed, he said, most about the noblest writers, as a rat was attracted to the best cheese, or a wasp to the fairest fruit; and he pronounced that to follow the craft would cost a man all the good qualities of his mind. The race had not improved when Johnson began his literary career. He described them as a class of beings who stood sentinels in the avenues of fame, for the purpose of "hindering the reception of every work of learning or genius," and whose acrimony was excited by the mere pain of hearing others praised.¹ There was not the same severity in their virtue that there was in their pens. Johnson relates that some had been pacified by claret and a supper, and others with praise;² and Lintot, a few years earlier, had told Pope that his mode of disarming them was to invite them to eat a slice of beef and pudding.³ The authors themselves were those who exulted most in the defamation of authors, just as Fielding says that the rabble took such immense pleasure in seeing men hanged, that they forgot, while they were enjoying the spectacle, that it was in all probability to be their own fate.⁴

Few of those who rose to permanent eminence in the eighteenth century had been compelled to join the mob of writers. Men like Addison found patrons, and, if they had not, were in a position to keep clear of the haunts of pauperism. Swift had his livings, Young had his

¹ [*The Rambler*, No. 3.]

² [*Ibid.*]

³ [Pope to Lord Burlington, *Works*, vol. x. p. 209.]

⁴ [*The Covent Garden Journal*, No. 49.]

fellowship, Akenside his practice, Gray his patrimony and his professorship. Pope lived with his family, and wrote his works in the comfortable ease of a domestic circle. Smollett, whose independent means were small, yet managed to have a good house and a plentiful table, and was attacked by Goldsmith for despising authorship and valuing riches. The peculiarity of the case of Johnson and of Goldsmith is, that, until they had worked their way unaided to fame, they were mingled undistinguishably with the herd of despised drudges—with scribes whose ordinary effusions, according to Fielding, were blasphemy, treason, and indecency¹—with men who were ready to write anything for hire, and who took care by their conduct to justify their abject condition. The greatness of Johnson can only be fully understood by considering the circumstances under which it was displayed. He was like a piece of gold hid among a pile of halfpence, and he came out unsoiled by the contact.

What money Johnson earned, or how he earned it, when he first visited London, is not known. He arrived at the beginning of March, 1737. He afterwards withdrew to Greenwich, where he continued *Irene*. In the latter part of the summer he went back to Mrs. Johnson, at Lichfield, and there completed his tragedy. At the close of the year he returned to the metropolis, and took his wife with him. His expectations were doubtless centred in his play, to which he had devoted an amount of toil which was contrary to his usual habits, and which he never bestowed on any subsequent work. His feelings when he had brought his long labour to a close may be presumed to be expressed in one of his letters in the *Rambler*: "I delayed my departure for a time, to finish the performance by which I was to draw the first notice of mankind upon me. When it was completed I hurried to London, and considered every moment that passed before its publication as lost in a kind of neutral existence, and cut off from

¹ [*The Covent Garden Journal*, No. 51.]

the golden hours of happiness and fame.”¹ Mr. Fleetwood was then patentee of Drury Lane theatre. He was a gentleman of good extraction, who had squandered in gambling a large hereditary estate. Without a taste for the drama, or a turn for business, he became a manager from the single motive of obtaining means to feed his pleasures. Unable to support more expensive amusements, he had descended to be a patron of pugilism, and passed his days among the low and brutal frequenters of the ring.² “He even,” Mallet wrote to Aaron Hill, “carries away the actors from rehearsals to boxing matches at Tottenham Court, where he himself presides as umpire.”³ In the midst of the degraded rabble and coarse language by which he was surrounded, he retained his original courtly address; but the conduct of his theatre was chiefly in the hands of an arrogant, illiterate creditor, who, we may conclude from the tone of Johnson in his *Life of Savage* a few years later, had subjected the poor tragedy-writer to some of those gratuitous indignities which vulgar and ignorant men seldom fail to inflict upon unknown genius in distress. Hence he speaks of the getting a piece brought upon the stage “as an undertaking in a very high degree vexatious and disgusting to an ingenuous mind,” and the reason he assigns is that it is necessary to submit to the dictation of actors, a class of persons whom he characterises as being all but universally “contemptuous, insolent, petulant, selfish, and brutal.”⁴ His play rejected at Drury Lane, he could not hope for a more favourable reception at Covent Garden, where silent pantomime, under the government of Rich, had been long in the ascendant. The patentee was himself an expressive actor of dumb show, and an ingenious contriver of pageants and scenic effects. He looked down upon the legitimate drama with

¹ [*The Rambler*, No. 163.]

² Davies's *Life of Garrick*, vol. i. pp. 66-69.

³ Feb. 3, 1738, *Murray MSS.*

⁴ [Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*, vol. ii. pp. 358, 354.]

a mixture of envy and contempt, and when he permitted its performance, seemed annoyed if it drew a house.¹ A scornful refusal was all that could be expected from a manager who gloried in his own pantomimic devices, and openly expressed his aversion for both plays and players. To have applied to him was courting insult, and Johnson does not seem to have run the risk. He turned away from the theatre with irritated dignity, and, putting back Irene into his desk, he bent his steps to the bookseller. His months of labour had been thrown away, and there was nothing in the fictitious distresses of his tragedy half so pathetic as the condition of its author.

The person to whom he had recourse was Cave. He was the publisher of the *Gentleman's Magazine*, and never, Johnson said, "looked out of the window, but with a view to it."² Such was his minute anxiety respecting it that he would name a particular person who he heard had talked of leaving it off, and would exclaim, "Let us have something good next month."³ Johnson addressed to him a complimentary Latin ode, and was enrolled among the regular contributors to his periodical. He spoke of him in later years with great affection, and described him as "a good man who always delighted to have his friends at table."⁴ However sensible he may have been of the value of his new contributor, whose articles, compared to the flimsy stuff which filled the journals of that day, were like jewels among sand, Cave does not seem to have relaxed his parsimony in his favour. The wages of Johnson were those of the ordinary literary drudges of his time, and the terms which conscious merit would have induced him to refuse, starving indigence compelled him to accept.

What was of far greater importance than the papers in the Magazine was that Johnson, in March, 1738, had completed one of his immortal productions. This was his

¹ Davies's *Life of Garrick*, vol. i. pp. 99, 111, 339.

² [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 804.]

³ [*Ibid.*, p. 604.]

⁴ [*Ibid.*, p. 804.]

"London, in imitation of the Third Satire of Juvenal." He sent it to Cave, without telling him from whose pen it proceeded, and manifested a consciousness of its power by the language of his letter, in which he said, "I do not doubt but you will look over this poem with another eye, and reward it in a different manner from a mercenary book-seller, who counts the lines he is to purchase, and considers nothing but the bulk." He joined the plea of distress to the plea of merit, and asked for generous treatment, because the author, he said, "lies at present under very disadvantageous circumstances of fortune."¹ Johnson relates of Cave that he was "a greater lover of poetry than any other art";² but his judgment in it was worthless, and, though not a liberal man, his beneficence on this occasion was in excess of his taste. He sent a small donation to relieve the wants of the poet, and declined to purchase his piece. He offered, however, to print it, and resign all the profits to the author, if the author would undertake to make good any loss. Having confidence in his poem, Johnson closed with the proposal. A bookseller who was better versed in literature than Cave, soon relieved him of the risk. The manuscript was shown to Dodsley, for the purpose of obtaining his consent to put his name, as one of the publishers, on the title-page. Dodsley perceived some part of its excellence, declared "it was a creditable thing to be concerned in," and ultimately bought the copyright for ten guineas. "I might, perhaps," says Johnson, "have accepted of less, but that Paul Whitehead had a little before got ten guineas for a poem, and I would not take less than Paul Whitehead."³ Speaking in the Rambler, under an assumed character, Johnson observes, "I knew that no performance is so favourably read as that of a writer who suppresses his name, and therefore resolved to re-

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 34.]

² [*Life of Cave*, *Works*, vol. xii. p. 215.]

³ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 35.]

main concealed till those by whom literary reputation is established had given their suffrages too publicly to retract them."¹ This may be supposed to be the reason why London appeared anonymously. The event justified his calculation. His poem came out the same morning with Pope's satire entitled "1738"; and, though no just comparison can be drawn between writers by contrasting a single production of each, it was a grand triumph for the new author that he had eclipsed a piece which ranks among the better works of the old. Accordingly, the language of literary circles was, "Here is an unknown poet greater even than Pope!" and a second edition was called for before the end of a week. The curiosity of Pope himself was excited. He enquired after the writer, and, being told that he was an obscure person of the name of Johnson, he replied, "He will soon be *déterré*."² The many circumstances in the Satire of Juvenal which were applicable to his own situation and prospects had, there can be no question, suggested the undertaking to him, and he marked one point of resemblance in particular by printing in capital letters the line—

SLOW RISES WORTH BY POVERTY DEPRESSED.

Viewed in connection with Johnson's history, what pathos there is in this emphasis of type! "Hark ye, Clinker" says Matthew Bramble, after listening to the allegations against the outcast parish lad, "you are a most notorious offender. You stand convicted of sickness, hunger, wretchedness, and want."³

Humble as were Johnson's notions, they exceeded his earnings. An Irish painter, whom he met at Birmingham, told him he could live very well for thirty pounds a year. He was to rent a garret for eighteenpence a week, to breakfast on bread and milk for a penny, dine for six-

¹ [*The Rambler*, No. 163.]

² [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 36.]

³ [*Humphry Clinker*, Smollett's *Works*, 1 vol. ed., p. 818.]

pence, spend threepence at a coffee-house for the sake of good company, and do without supper. Ten pounds were allowed for clothes and linen, and visits were to be paid on clean-shirt days.¹ Johnson dined at first, much to his own satisfaction, for eightpence. But, like the Thales of his London, "every moment left his little less," and for a long time he was reduced to subsist on fourpence halfpenny a day. His poem, which increased his fame, did not improve his circumstances. It appeared in the month of May, and in September he signs himself to Cave, "Yours, *impransus*."² At a later period of his literary life he was sometimes without food for forty-eight hours, and his abstinence could not have been much less at a time when he intimated by his signature that he had eaten no dinner, for want of the money to procure it.³

He had relinquished school-keeping for literature, and now, in the extremity of his distress, was eager to get from literature back to school-keeping, preferring anything, as he said, to being "starved to death in translating for booksellers."⁴ The mastership of the school at Appleby, in Leicestershire, was vacant. The trustees resided in the neighbourhood of Lichfield, and had made up their minds to nominate him to the post. But the statutes required that he should be a Master of Arts, and a common friend solicited the University of Oxford, through Dr. Adams, to confer the degree upon him. The request was refused. Johnson said proudly, in later days, in allusion to the number of poets his college had produced, "Sir, we are a nest of singing birds!"⁵ If this had been the case in

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 28.]

² [*Ibid.*, p. 39.]

³ "Might not *impransus*," says Mr. Nichols, "simply mean *before dinner*, or *I have not dined*?" which is to deprive the word of any proper meaning whatever. Johnson's letter is a complete answer to Cave, and leaves no room for the interpretation that he was apologizing for an imperfect reply by the intimation that his dinner hour was come. The single word was Johnson's dignified mode of intimating his necessities to Cave.

⁴ [Lord Gower's Letter, Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 38.]

⁵ [*Memoirs of Hannah More*, vol. i. p. 261.]

1738 with the University at large, they would not have refused an honorary degree to the author of *London*—a man who, while he resided among them, had shown his scholarship by the published translation of the *Messiah*, who had never tasted their endowments, and who had been prevented by poverty alone from attaining, in the regular course, what he now asked to deliver him from a poverty as great as that indigence which cut short his college career. Oxford having declined to qualify him for his office, an attempt was made, through Lord Gower, to induce Swift to ask the favour of the University of Dublin. But with Dublin Johnson had no connection, and it is not surprising that nothing should have come of the application. The sixty pounds a year endowment, which Lord Gower said in his letter “would make the poor man happy for life,”¹ was for ever lost to him, and his next idea was to become an advocate at Doctors’ Commons. “I am,” he said, “a total stranger to these studies, but whatever is a profession, and maintains numbers, must be within reach of common abilities, and some amount of industry.”² Here, again, he was stopped for want of a degree, which was an indispensable qualification, and he was thrown back upon his starving work of translation. He was in the same dilemma with Macbeth: “There is no flying hence, nor tarrying here”;³ but, like Macbeth, he tarried because he could not fly. He made no more efforts to escape from his destiny, and his lot henceforth was that of an author. “Ye,” exclaims Johnson, “who listen with credulity to the whispers of fancy, and pursue with eagerness the phantoms of hope, attend to the history of *Rasselas*, Prince of Abyssinia.”⁴ With much more reason might those who think of adopting literature as a profession, seduced by dazzling dreams of affluence and fame, attend to the history of Samuel Johnson. Whoever weighs the sufferings against the

¹ [Boswell’s *Johnson*, p. 37.]

² [*Ibid.*, p. 38.]

³ [*Macbeth*, Act v. Sc. v.]

⁴ [*Rasselas*, chap. i.]

success will have little reason to envy his lot ; and, though he presents as grand a spectacle of a brave man struggling with distress as the world ever saw, the grandeur is felt by those who contemplate his career, and little besides the distress was felt by himself.

Most of his productions during the early part of his sojourn in London have not been traced. In 1740 his known contributions to the *Gentleman's Magazine* become more important, and it was at the conclusion of this year that he began to compose the "Parliamentary Debates," which he had previously been employed to revise. Persons were sent to the Houses of Lords and Commons to learn the names of the speakers and the sides they took. Sometimes his informants brought away notes of what was said, and from these slender materials Johnson constructed the finished speeches which appeared in the *Magazine*. His last, and upon the whole his ablest, effort of the kind was his report of the discussion on Spirituous Liquors, in February, 1743. He then desisted from the task on discovering, what he had never before suspected, that these effusions of his pen were supposed to be the true debates, "for he would not," he said, "be accessory to the propagation of falsehood." Though there could be no guilt where no fraud was designed, and though not a single ill effect was alleged to have been produced by the misconception of the public, his detestation of everything deceptive was so extreme that a few days before his death he declared that the Debates "were the only part of his writings which gave him compunction."¹ Their genuineness was long undoubted, even by men who might have been thought to be in a position to hear the truth from the members of either House of Parliament. Three of the speeches were published by Dr. Maty in the works of Lord Chesterfield "as specimens of his lordship's eloquence"; and years after the scrupulous moralist had abandoned the practice, Dr. Francis, the translator of

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 804.]

Demosthenes and Horace, mentioned at a dinner, at which Johnson was present, that the reply of Mr. Pitt to the elder Horace Walpole in the debate on Seamen, in 1741, was the finest he had ever read,—finer than anything in the great Greek orator himself. The rest of the company were loud in their applause, and when panegyric was exhausted, Johnson exclaimed, "That speech I wrote in a garret in Exeter Street." This vigorous piece of fierce invective is the best burst of declamation he produced.¹

The excellence of the speeches may have done much to remove suspicion. It may have appeared more probable that they should be faithful reports than that they should be the composition of a magazine writer; but, as Flood remarked, they are none of them in the least like real debates,² and they are all written in one style, and that the mannered style of Johnson. The substance is just as much in his usual strain of speculation and moralising. There is a vast amount of reflection, very few facts, and very little politics. His addiction to generalities is the cause why he displays, in the conflict of opposite opinions, less argumentative ingenuity than might be expected from his notable skill in maintaining either side of a question, and making the worse appear the better reason. When he was praised for his impartiality in holding the balance even between the contending parties, he answered, "That is not quite true. I saved appearances tolerably well, but I took care that the Whig dogs should not have the best of it."³ It would be impossible, however, from the debates themselves to discover his bias. Both sides declaim with equal plausibility of assertion and power of language. The pride of the author prevailed over the prejudices of the politician, and as every speech was in fact his own, he could not resist the impulse to put the strongest arguments and most forcible expressions into the mouth of the speaker. None of his works were written with equal

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 45 and notes.]

² [*Ibid.*, p. 223.]

³ [Murphy's Essay in Johnson's *Works*, vol. i. pp. 43-45.]

velocity. "Three columns of the Magazine," he said, "in an hour was no uncommon effort, which was faster than most persons could have transcribed that quantity."¹ Considered in this light, the composition is extraordinary. There is abundance of amplified commonplaces, but intermingled with admirable reflections, which are conveyed throughout in a polished and stately style, and in diction remarkable for its copiousness and vigour. Some of the speeches on Spirituous Liquors are finished dissertations on the evil effects, individual and national, of habits of intoxication, and would be supposed to be the result of unusual care.

There was once an idea of bringing Johnson himself into Parliament. Conceiving, as was conjectured by Lord Stowell, that, like the elephant in battle, so headstrong a champion might trample down friends as well as foes, Lord North declined to forward the scheme. Mr. Flood was reasonably of opinion that Johnson, at the age of sixty-two, had been too long used to the sententious brevity and short flights of conversation to have acquired the "expanded kind of argument" necessary in Parliament; but nothing could be less reasonable than to refer to the imaginary debates in the Magazine in proof of this position. Whatever may be their fault, it assuredly is not want of expansion; and they are essays and not speeches, exactly because they were written to be read and not to be spoken. At any period while his mind retained its pliancy, Johnson could have had no difficulty in varying the treatment of his subject to fit their altered purpose. Burke pronounced that if he had come early into the House of Commons he would have been beyond question the greatest speaker that ever appeared there. He several times attempted an harangue in the Society of Arts and Sciences, and told Sir William Scott "that he found he could not get on." He must have meant he could not get on to the satisfaction of himself, for Dr. Kippis heard him

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 804.]

speak there on a question of mechanics "with a perspicuity and energy which excited general admiration."¹ Promptitude of mind was one of his most conspicuous qualities, and a little practice would have rendered oratorical contests as congenial to him as colloquial.

Like the dawning light which shows itself to the world before the luminary is visible from which it proceeds, Johnson's writings were admired long before he himself was brought into view. While he was penning speeches for eminent statesmen which eclipsed their own productions, he was not always able even to command a garret. About the time when he commenced the Parliamentary debates, he and Savage discussed politics one night, as they walked round and round St. James's Square because they were destitute of a lodging. In high spirits and brimful of patriotism they continued their circuit for several hours, inveighing against Sir Robert Walpole and resolving "that they would stand by their country." By four in the morning fatigue got the better of patriotic fervour; they began to wish for refreshment, and found that they could only make up fourpence halfpenny between them.² Savage died in 1743, and in the following year Johnson published a Life of him. This unhappy man was at once extravagantly proud and meanly importunate. He demanded alms with the air of a king who levies rightful taxes on his subjects, and thought to dignify beggary by insolence. Instead of being grateful for what was bestowed, he was enraged when anything was withheld, and to have been once his friend was to ensure his subsequent enmity. His conversation was doubtless the circumstance which recommended him to his future biographer. Johnson had never come within reach of the heads of his profession. Savage had herded with many of them as well as with various persons of rank. He was a close and accurate observer of mankind, had

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, pp. 222, 223.]

² [*Ibid.*, p. 49; Murphy's *Essay*, Johnson's *Works*, vol. i. p. 33.]

a singularly tenacious memory, and possessed the art of communicating his reminiscences in easy, elegant, and vivacious language. It may readily be conceived with what eager interest Johnson would listen to his traits and anecdotes. What he saw in him was the companion of Pope and the describer of the many-coloured scenes of life, not the vindictive spendthrift and abandoned reveller. Their companionship was of short duration, for it is certain they were not acquainted when Johnson published his *London*, in May, 1738; and Savage left the metropolis in July, 1739, and never returned to it.]

With so unpromising a hero, whose talents were not extraordinary,¹ and the incidents of whose career were neither numerous nor creditable, Johnson produced a biography which, as Croker happily remarks, "gives, like Raphael's Lazarus or Murillo's Beggar, pleasure as a work of art, while the original could only excite disgust."² The splendour of the author's mind, reflected from the page, redeems the inherent poverty of the subject. Yet the effect is not obtained by ascribing to Savage fictitious virtues or an imaginary importance. His ill-regulated disposition and ignoble career, if touched with tenderness, are described with as much fidelity as power. The interest springs honestly from the skill of the narrative

¹ Fielding relates that the writings of Savage had long lain uncalled for in the warehouse till he happened, very fortunately for his bookseller, to be convicted at the Old Bailey of having killed one Sinclair in a tavern scuffle, by running him through with a sword. The bookseller immediately advertised "The Works of Mr. Savage, now under Sentence of Death for Murder," and the whole stock was sold. The man next offered the condemned poet a high price for a "Dying Speech," which Savage accordingly furnished. When, contrary to all expectation, he was pardoned, he wished to return the money. The bookseller preferred to stand by the bargain. He published the Speech which Mr. Savage had intended to make at Tyburn; and Fielding says "it is probable as many were sold as there were people in town who could read." [*Covent Garden Journal*, No. 51.] It is wonderful to reflect upon the circumstances which are a source of interest in the eyes of the multitude, when poems before neglected assumed a sudden value because their author was to be hanged for murder.

² [Croker's note to Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 50.]

and the reflections which are interwoven with it. The work was thrown off at a heat. "I wrote," Johnson said, "forty-eight of the printed octavo pages at a sitting; but then I sat up all night."¹ It bears no marks of the haste with which it was composed; the style is not so harmonious and compact as that to which he had attained when he wrote the *Lives of the Poets*; but it is always imposing and often terse, and runs on in a full and equable flow from the opening to the close.

The copyright of the *Life of Savage* was purchased by Cave for fifteen guineas. No succession of masterpieces that it was in the power of man to produce could have enabled an author, at this price, to earn a subsistence; the money received for one performance would have been spent long before he could have collected the materials for a second. Thus Johnson was obliged to go back to his usual taskwork, in which the returns were quick, however small. His subsistence depended on his weekly earnings, and he must have had some occupation which would afford him an immediate return. Sermons at a guinea a piece, the revision of crude matter for Cave's *Magazine*, and any of the other literary job work which attaches to the business of a publisher, may be supposed to have formed his support during the blank period which followed the publication of his *Life of Savage*. There were seasons when fits of unusual sluggishness, engendered by an accession of his constitutional malady, rendered subordinate and almost mechanical tasks more endurable to him than higher undertakings, and it is not surprising that, in the course of his prolonged struggle for bread, he should sometimes have resigned himself to the execution of any routine commissions which enabled him to provide, by passing expedient, for the passing day. His employment in 1745 and 1746 was so obscure that with the exception of some "Miscellaneous Observations upon *Macbeth*," which appeared in the former of these years,

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 50.]

no trace is preserved of his labours. Mr. Croker inclined to the belief that he had dabbled in the Rebellion and was obliged to keep concealed.¹ To suppose that he was out in Forty-five, and that his journey to the Hebrides was not his first visit to Scotland, merely because we do not know where he was or what he was doing at the period, is an assumption too rash to be entertained. But there is conclusive evidence from Johnson's own lips that the conjecture is unfounded. He told Mr. Langton "that nothing had ever offered that made it worth his while to consider fully the question" of the right of the Stuarts, which he certainly could not have said if he had gone so far as to engage in the Pretender's cause. Boswell had heard him declare that "if holding up his right hand would have secured victory to Prince Charles at Culloden, he was not sure that he would have held it up."² His Tory predilections were strong, but it is not likely that they ever hurried him into treason, or that his idea of "standing by his country" was to aid a Highland army to invade it. With a playful consciousness that they were destined to hold a conspicuous place in English literature, he remarked to Goldsmith, as they looked at the monuments in Poets' Corner,—

"Forsitan et nostrum nomen miscebitur istis."

On their return home through Temple Bar, Goldsmith pointed to the heads of the rebels which were stuck upon it, and slyly whispered in the ear of his companion—

"Forsitan et nostrum nomen miscebitur ISTIS."³

The jest has a significance beyond what has ever been imputed to it, and must have been heard by Johnson with a shudder, if he had indeed made common cause with the men whose visages were mouldering above.⁴

¹ [Croker, in Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 54.]

² [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 147.]

³ [*Ibid.*, p. 258.]

⁴ Ghastly as was this spectacle, it was less revolting than is commonly supposed; for the heads being coated with tar to prevent their becoming noisome, they were not more offensive in appearance than Egyptian mummies.

In 1747 Johnson again emerged to the surface with the Plan of his English Dictionary. His occasional productions, while he was proceeding with his gigantic task, were either few at the commencement, or they have remained unknown. He furnished to Dodsley's Preceptor, in 1748, a paper of about eighteen octavo pages called the Vision of Theodore, which he penned one night after a festive evening, and which he once said he thought the best thing he had ever written.¹ The ground of his preference is not apparent. The principal object of the piece is to hold out a warning against the contraction of evil habits. Of these he says felicitously that "each link of the chain grows tighter as it has been longer worn, and when by continual additions they become so heavy as to be felt, they are very frequently too strong to be broken." But the allegory is hackneyed, and displays little ingenuity or fancy. The precepts are trite, and are not set off by any novelty of form or illustration. If, however, the distinction of being his masterpiece did not belong to the Vision of Theodore, he might with reason have claimed the honour for the work which he published in the ensuing year. This was his famous Vanity of Human Wishes, which he composed, according to his usual practice, with marvellous rapidity. He once accomplished a hundred lines in a single day. If Johnson were judged by what he has done best, his place should be among the poets. When Ballantyne asked Scott what in all our poetical language gave him the greatest pleasure, he answered, "London and the Vanity of Human Wishes." "I think," adds Ballantyne, "I never saw his countenance more indicative of admiration than while reciting aloud from these productions."² As Scott asserted that the "pathetic morality of the Vanity of Human Wishes had often drawn tears," there can be no doubt that this involuntary tribute had been paid by himself.³ Byron

1749

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 59.] ² [Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, vol. iii. p. 269.]

³ [Scott's *Memoir of Johnson*, in Ballantyne's Library.]

called it a "grand poem," and said "that the examples and mode of giving them were both sublime."¹ It is in a far more elevated strain than the London. The ideas are of a loftier cast, the language is more nervous and poetical, and the characters are drawn with a force and splendour of description which are unrivalled. The sketch of Charles XII. of Sweden is the gem of the whole. The glow and fire and pomp of the lines which depict him in the pride of military glory, and the pathos of the lines which paint his reverses and his death, are perfect in themselves, and impress more deeply by the contrast. In almost every instance the English poet has soared above his Latin original.² Johnson, coming after so many models, has copied none of them in the construction of his heroic verse, which has a swell and majesty of its own. Without the various music of Dryden it is more sonorous, and fills the ear with its sound as it fills the mind with its pregnant sense. A few imperfect rhymes in London excepted, he has sacrificed nothing to the exigencies of verse. Neither Pope nor any other writer is equally free from negligent lines, or succeeds, in the same sustained degree, in combining the restraints imposed by poetry with the order and exactness of prose.

The fifteen guineas which Johnson received for the *Vanity of Human Wishes* was quickly followed by a larger sum than he could ever have possessed before. When Garrick, in 1747, opened Drury Lane Theatre, Johnson furnished the celebrated Prologue. He now

¹ [Byron, Jan. 9, 1821, *Works*, vol. v. p. 66.]

² The opening couplet is the worst in the poem :—

Let Observation, with extensive view,
Survey mankind from China to Peru.

He had to contend here with Dryden's consummate rendering of the original, which is as literal as it is admirable :—

Look round the habitable world, how few
Know their own good, or knowing it pursue.

Johnson was cramped by the evident desire to avoid echoing a version which he could not mend.

looked to Garrick to introduce the neglected Irene to the world. The name of Johnson was beginning to be heard. His *Life of Savage* was admired ; his poems were thought equal to Pope ; and his noble Prologue, which was several times called for during the season, had made him favourably known to the frequenters of the theatre. A tragedy from his pen was no unpromising speculation, and if his piece had been well adapted for the stage, he might have appealed to the manager with as much confidence as to the friend. But Irene was too barren of incident to be an effective play, and when Garrick proposed alterations his old master took offence. "Sir," said he to Dr. Taylor, who attempted to mediate in the dispute, "the fellow wants me to make Mahomet run mad that he may have an opportunity of tossing his hands and kicking his heels."¹ Johnson seemed to think that the actor desired to shine at the expense of the author, and he considered it a liberty that the personator of a part should presume to revise the work of its creator. He might have reflected that if the player was an incompetent critic of literary beauties, he was by far the best judge of the situations and passions which affected an audience. Garrick, in particular, had a prophetic taste. He went through the tragedies of *Barbarossa* and *Athelstan* with Dr. Brown, and not only pointed out the passages which would tell in the representation, but correctly predicted the degree of applause which each of those passages would call forth.² The grudging consent which was at last wrung from the intractable author to permit some scanty changes in Irene was insufficient to remedy the defects, and the result was a vindication of the foresight of Garrick.

Neither the rejection of his warnings, nor the captious anger of Johnson, abated the zeal of the manager. He provided Eastern costumes of unusual magnificence, and

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 60.]

² Percival Stockdale's *Memoirs*, vol. ii. p. 17.

gay scenes of Eastern palaces and gardens. He resigned the part of Mahomet to Barry, to interest him in the piece, and exerted all his own powers in Demetrius. "He made the most," says Aaron Hill, in a letter to Mallet, "of a detached and almost independent character. He was elegantly dressed, and charmed by an excessive force of silent paintings, and by a peculiar touchingness in cadency of voice, from exclamation sinking into pensive lownesses, that both surprised and interested. Mrs. Cibber did the utmost justice to her part, which is of the soft, pitiable, gentle turn, in which mild walk she has certainly no rival."¹ This exquisite actress, who, contrary to Hill's supposition, expressed all passions with equal grace and energy, and whose voice retained its delicious music even in the paroxysms of grief and the vehemence of anger, was seconded by the great abilities of Mrs. Pritchard, who played the heroine. The united efforts of such capital performers gave the fullest effect to every line that the author had set down for them, but could not supply the want of movement, variety, and pathos. The tragedy was brought out on February 6, 1749, and was heard with respectful unconcern for thirteen nights. The first representation was the most successful, probably because a crowd of Johnson's friends were present. Dr. Burney, who was among the number, says there was much applause, especially at the speech of "To-morrow." A burst of disapprobation towards the close was silenced by concession. When Irene was about to be strangled with the bow-string, there was a cry of "Murder! murder!" and she ultimately went off alive.² It is singular that her death upon the stage was one of the few changes which were introduced at the urgent solicitation of Garrick, whose object no doubt was to add another "situation" to a piece which was deficient in action.³ Instead of impressing the spectators, the expedient shocked them. If

¹ *Murray MSS.*

² [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 61.]

³ [Davies's *Life of Garrick*, vol. i. p. 128.]

their minds had been hurried along by the previous scenes, the tumult of emotion might have reached its climax in the visible catastrophe. Appealing to calm, unimpassioned judgments, the spectacle appeared an execution in cold blood, and revolted persons who melted into tears at the suffocation of Desdemona.

Johnson mentions of Dodsley that he attended every night behind the scenes during the run of *Cleone*, and always cried at the distress of his own heroine.¹ Neither the author nor anyone else could have shed a tear at the frigid dialogue of *Irene*, but he was always present at the performance, and thought that his new-born dignity required him to go equipped in a gold-laced hat and a gold-laced scarlet waistcoat. Beauclerk heard him relate that he soon laid aside his green-room finery, for fear it should make him proud, and he told Mr. Langton that he found, when he wore it, he could not treat people with the same ease as when he was in his ordinary dress.² The truth is, until he put on his dramatic livery he had never been possessed of a decent suit of clothes, and he was experiencing at forty the sensations which others pass through at twenty-one.

The profits of the author's three nights were £195 17s., which, with the £100 that Dodsley paid for the copyright, amounted to near £300. But Johnson, who had witnessed the increasing apathy of the audience, did not delude himself. He was aware that his tragedy had not made an impression, and when asked how he felt, replied, "Like the monument."³ The failure would have been more signal, and the cause for mortification much deeper, if his play had been produced at the period when it was written. With inferior actors, and less splendid decorations, the lukewarmness of the audience would have been turned to distaste. The rejection of the piece by Fleetwood left Johnson the consciousness of merit; but the condemnation

¹ [Johnson to Langton, Jan. 9, 1758; Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 113.]

² [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 61.]

³ [*Ibid.*, p. 61.]

by the public, before his talents had been recognised, would have been a blow to his self-reliance. He had since acquired a reputation in other departments, and his hopes of fame were no longer dependent on a theatrical triumph. The mere time which had elapsed since his play was completed, diminished the disappointment of a small success. During the ten years in which Irene was buried in oblivion, the toil of composition was forgotten, and the first pride of authorship was abated. Little, perhaps, besides money, had been gained by the venture, but nothing had been lost.

Some years afterwards Murphy suggested to Garrick to invite his friend, who was involved in difficulties, to attempt another play. "When Johnson," replied the manager, "writes tragedy, 'declamation roars and passion sleeps'; when Shakespeare wrote, he dipped his pen in his heart."¹ The words which Garrick quoted against Johnson from his own Prologue at the opening of Drury Lane Theatre are not a little remarkable, for the passage in which they occur exactly describes, and emphatically condemns, the very species of tragedy of which Irene was an extreme example. He esteemed Addison's Cato, according to Hawkins, "the best model we had."² It was plainly the model he followed, and no less clear that he gave it the preference because it was in a style which was adapted to his own powers. But, though the author was seduced into applauding what it suited him to imitate, the critic saw with truer eyes, and hence, both in his Prologue and his Life of Addison, he did not spare "the unaffected elegance and chill philosophy" of his master. No more perfect description can be found of Irene than in his strictures upon Cato. "Of this work," he says, "it has not been unjustly determined that it is rather a poem in dialogue than a drama, rather a succession of just sentiments in elegant language than a representation

¹ [Murphy's *Essay*, in Johnson's *Works*, vol. i. p. 53.]

² [*Johnsoniana*, No. 262.]

of natural affections, or of any state probable or possible in human life. Nothing here 'excites or assuages emotion': here is 'no magical power of raising fantastic terror or wild anxiety.' The events are expected without solicitude, and are remembered without joy or sorrow. Of the agents we have no care; we consider not what they are doing, or what they are suffering; we wish only to know what they have to say. There is not one amongst them that strongly attracts either affection or esteem."¹ The plot of Irene is meagre and awakens no suspense; the incidents are few, unexciting, and not always probable; the agents are destitute of individuality, and appear to be mere elocutionists who have no identity with the words they utter. As the declamatory dialogue does not come from the heart, so neither does it go to it. The characters only meet to oppose sentiment to sentiment, and maxim to maxim, in set speeches, which even when fullest of "sound and fury" fall coldly upon the mind. The diction, in spite of metaphors, is prosaic, and the lines are without any charm of melody. His blank verse has none of that grand and massive roll which distinguishes his heroic measure. A general monotony of sense, manner, and metre, without rise or fall, pervades the piece, and fatigues attention. He boasted to the audience that he had trusted in "Reason, Nature, and Truth." Of moral truth, and moral argumentation, there was more than enough, but "Nature," as he said of his predecessors, "had fled," and "virtue and philosophy" had usurped her throne. He could not write anything which did not show his command of language, but his tragedy shines with a pale light which neither dazzles nor warms. He once asked Mrs. Thrale which was the scene she preferred in the whole of our drama. She answered, "The dialogue in Cato between Syphax and Juba." "Nay, nay," replied Johnson, "if you are for declamation, I hope my ladies have the better of them all."² His high opinion of his play appears to have abated in after years. When it was read aloud in

¹ [Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*, vol. ii. p. 161.] ² [Johnsoniana, No. 192.]

a country house he left the room, and on being asked the reason, replied, "I thought it had been better."¹

Johnson undervalued the player's art, of which the action came dimmed to his eyes, and the elocution dulled to his ears. But his contact with the theatre led him occasionally to frequent the green-room, where he could indulge his favourite employments of watching human nature under new aspects and of joining in animated talk. "At that period," he said, "all the wenches knew me, and dropped me a curtesy as they passed on the stage."² Though the players of his day treated indigent authors with insolence, and Johnson was among the most ragged and needy of them, he had won from the actresses a curtesy of respect for his moral dignity and intellectual power,—a touching piece of simple and heartfelt homage, more to be coveted than a world of noisier applause.

Johnson's next work raised him in the estimation of the public to something of the same position which he occupied in the eyes of the actresses. / On the 20th of March, 1750, appeared the first number of the Rambler, which contributed, beyond all his previous productions, to an elevated estimate of his character and to the spread of his fame. The necessity for earning something in addition to the instalments he received in advance for his Dictionary was the stimulus to the undertaking. Nor was he ill-paid. The work came out twice a week, and for every essay he had a couple of guineas from Cave. The pressing need to make the whole of the money with his own pen may have been the cause why he did not communicate the scheme to his friends and invite their aid. His desire to keep the authorship a secret is not so easy to understand. He published London anonymously while he was yet unknown, / because, as Swift says,—

A poem read without a name
We justly praise or justly blame ;
And critics have no partial views,
Except they know whom they abuse.

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 656.]

² [*Johnsoniana*, No. 315.]

But Johnson's reputation was now sufficient to recommend his writings and would have assisted the sale. ~~He~~ He may, perhaps, have thought that it would check the freedom of his comments if their source was known. Whatever was his motive, he was soon compelled to drop the mask. Garrick early detected his vigorous hand, and Richardson expressed his conviction to Cave that there was no second person who was capable of the task. "I return to answer," wrote Cave, in August, 1750, when the idea of secrecy was abandoned, "that Mr. Johnson is the *Great Rambler*, being, as you observe, the only man who can furnish two such papers in a week, besides his other great business."¹ He composed them, as he did everything, upon the spur of the moment. The copy was seldom sent to the press till late in the night before the day of publication, and he usually wrote the concluding portion of the essay while the former part of it was being put into type. Often he did not even take the precaution to read what he had so hurriedly penned. A few heads of ideas upon certain topics, specimens of which have been preserved by Boswell, was all the preparation he had made. One of the memoranda he jotted down was "Sailor's life my aversion," and this Hawkins printed "Sailor's fate any mansion."²

"When the author was to be kept private," said Cave, "two gentlemen belonging to the Prince's Court came to me to enquire his name in order to do him service." Bubb Dodington invited the unknown writer to his house. Dr. Young and many other persons of note wrote letters of approbation, some placing the Rambler upon a level with the Spectator, and some, like Richardson, pronouncing it superior. "The encouragement as to sale," Cave added, "is not in proportion to the high character given to the work by the judicious, not to say the raptures expressed by the few that do read it."³ He rightly augured

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 65, note.]

² [Hawkins's *Life of Johnson*, p. 266.]

³ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 65, note.]

that the completed series would have a larger circulation than the single numbers, for the topics were not of a nature to divert the ordinary purchasers of a twopenny periodical. A moral tendency was perceptible in all the writings of Johnson; it was the main design of the Rambler. Before commencing it, he offered up a prayer "that it might promote the glory of God and the salvation both of himself and others."¹ He carried it on in the same spirit with which it was begun, and in the concluding number he professed that, if he had executed his intentions, his labours "would be found exactly conformable to the precepts of Christianity, without any accommodation to the licentiousness and levity of the age." He was not, he said, "much dejected by his want of popularity, for he only expected those to peruse his essays whose passions left them leisure for abstracted truth, and whom virtue could please by its naked dignity."² Few of the persons under whose eyes they first fell were of this superior class. People complained that he had not adopted the lighter style and subjects of the Spectator. He answered that some themes had already been treated with too much success to permit competition, and that an author must be guided by the course of his studies and the accidents of his life.³ This adherence to the bent of his mind gave the distinctive character to his work, and when its real nature came to be understood, and the world looked in it for what it contained, and not for what their preconceived notions had pictured, they were loud in its praise.

In our day the Rambler has lost much of its pristine reputation. It cannot be denied that it contains many obvious truths delivered with pomp of phraseology and a magisterial air. The objection to the want of novelty had been anticipated by Johnson, who justly urged that men more frequently required to be reminded than reformed. His negligent age especially needed to be sum-

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 63.]

² [*The Rambler*, No. 208.]

³ [*Ibid.*, No. 23.]

moned back to their duties, and his lessons had a freshness and force to his contemporaries which, happily, they do not retain for us. No one now would obtain the name of the "Great Moralist" for a volume of grave essays enforcing moral precepts. It was the singularity of the publication which procured the title for Johnson, and it was to the circumstance that the truths were addressed to minds which had long neglected them that they owed much of their effect. But the intrinsic power of the Rambler was likewise great. The triter portions are redeemed by the abundance of original and sagacious reflections, and it is a marvel that papers written every Tuesday and Saturday, during the press of other labours, for two hundred consecutive weeks, should contain such weight and variety of sentiment. The most general complaint at the time was to the uniformity of the work. This was more, perhaps, in the manner than in the substance; when he changed his subject he could not change his style. He wrote letters in the name of female correspondents, and, as Burke remarked, all his ladies are Johnsons in petticoats.¹ He drew characters with a truth, which led a club in Essex to imagine that they were sketches of the members, and they were incensed against an acquaintance whom they suspected of the act;² but as all his representations were general descriptions in his formal style, without the animation of dialogue and incident, they did not contribute much to relieve the monotony. The chief contrast was produced by the few critical papers, which are novel and excellent, and it is surprising that Johnson, whose mind was teeming with literature, did not oftener avail himself of this ready resource.

In the summary of his aims in the final number of the Rambler, he takes especial credit for his style. "I have laboured," he says, "to refine our language to grammatical

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 71, note.]

² [*Ibid.*, p. 68; *Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 233.]

(purity and to clear it from colloquial barbarisms. Something, perhaps, I have added to the elegance of its construction, and something to the harmony of its cadence." In what particular he could imagine that he had refined the language of Dryden, Swift, and Addison to grammatical purity we are unable to conjecture. There are slips of the pen in every writer, and Johnson is not free from them, but systematic licence had not been left for him to reform. The other merits to which he lays claim have usually been numbered among his defects. His renunciation of familiar idioms gives an air of heaviness to his composition, and his love of sonorous periods betrayed him into verbosity and the use of a polysyllabic phraseology. There were people who said jocosely that his learned language was assumed to make his Dictionary indispensable. He has himself told his motive. "When common words were less pleasing to the ear, or less distinct in their signification, I have applied the terms of philosophy to popular ideas."¹ The extent to which he carried the habit has been enormously exaggerated. The ordinary method of exhibiting his practice has been to gather into half a dozen sentences as many grandiloquent phrases as are scattered through the whole of the Rambler, until all resemblance is lost in the extravagance of the caricature. The amplifications in which he indulged in his pursuit of a swelling harmony are both more frequent and more distasteful. While the mind grows impatient of a construction too uniform and mechanical, and of phrases multiplied for no other purpose than to round off a sentence, the ear is no less tired by the monotony of sound. He said of Knolles, the author of the History of the Turks, "that there was nothing turgid in his dignity nor superfluous in his copiousness."² Exactly the reverse is true of the Rambler. Boswell rightly denied that its style was "involved,"³ for it is in a high degree lucid; but

¹ [*The Rambler*, No. 208.]

² [*Ibid.*, No. 122.]

³ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 68.]

it was vain to contend that Johnson was only "turgid" in the Rambler when "common words were less pleasing to the ear, or less distinct in their signification." "There is," as Murphy says, "a swell of language often out of all proportion to the sentiment,"¹ and the ear itself is wearied by the forced and monotonous stateliness, which is the more cloying from the sameness in the structural turn of his sentences. The Rambler occupies a middle place between Johnson's early and later works, and exhibits, with his strength, more of his defects than his previous or subsequent productions. He had formed his style by degrees, and when it had attained to the height of its mannerism, he began to perceive himself that it was too inflated. He shook his head when he had one day glanced his eye over a paper in the Rambler, and exclaimed, "Too wordy."² "If the style of Robertson," he observed on another occasion, "be too wordy, he owes it to me—that is, having too many words, and those too big ones."³ His maturer writings are masterpieces of composition. He became more familiar in his language, pruned his redundancy, and varied his cadence. As his style grew less cumbrous it increased in vigour, till it reached its climax in the Lives of the Poets. But literary praise or blame sinks into insignificance before the tribute which the Rambler affords to the moral greatness of Johnson. He was not a theologian or a recluse. He was a man of letters, mixing largely in the society of his fellows. The tone of conversation was lax, and his brother-authors were not remarkable for their superior nicety. In the midst of licence, both of language and conduct, he never relaxed the severity of his principles, and walked through miry ways without contracting the smallest stain in his passage. Writing for bread, he yet refused to accommodate his matter to the taste of his readers, and instead of attempting to entertain them for his private advantage,

¹ [Murphy's *Essay*, Johnson's *Works*, vol. i. p. 157.]

² [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 656.]

³ [*Ibid.*, p. 552.]

he persisted in instructing them for their own. Whether he is pictured in his garret, or mingling in the haunts of his acquaintance, we must be struck, when we turn to the Rambler, with the heroism which could triumph over all these influences, and persevere in enforcing the maxims of wisdom upon an untoward generation.

Amongst the panegyrics bestowed upon the Rambler there was one which was especially grateful to its author. After a few numbers his wife said to him, "I thought very well of you before, but I did not imagine you could have written anything equal to this."¹ Her cheering commendation was soon to cease. The Rambler terminated with the 208th number, on the 14th of March, 1752, and on the 28th Mrs. Johnson died. She expired in the night, and her husband sent immediately for his friend, Dr. Taylor, who found him in tears and extreme agitation. His sixteen years of marriage had not been years of felicity. He told Mrs. Thrale that he and his wife disputed perpetually. She had a passion for cleanliness, and Johnson, who, when on visits in his better days, would turn candles upside down to make them burn brighter, and allow the grease to drop upon the carpet,² was not to be restrained in his own house. "Come," he would exclaim, "I think we have had talk enough about the floor; we will now have a touch at the ceiling."³ The food was a topic of dissension as well as the floor, and once, when he was about to say grace, she begged he would not go through the mockery of thanking God for a dinner which, in another minute, he would pronounce not fit to be eaten.⁴ But these little broils would not of themselves have embittered existence. The real evil was in the ceaseless contest with poverty which deepened his natural melancholy, and had probably no very favourable effect on the temper of his consort. According to Mrs. Desmoulins, who lived with her for some time at Hampstead, she did not treat him

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 65.]

² [*Ibid.*, p. 409, note.]

³ [*Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 146.]

⁴ [*Ibid.*, p. 150.]

with complacence, and indulged in country air and nice living, while he was drudging in London.¹ The sum was, as he confessed to Boswell, that his "gloomy irritability" had never been so painful as during his married life.² The latter days of Mrs. Johnson were epitomised by Levett in a single phrase—"perpetual illness and perpetual opium."³ In the sermon which her husband wrote on her death, she is described as passing through these months of sickness without one murmur of impatience, and often expressed her gratitude for the mercy which had granted her so long a period for repentance. Even at this distance of time, when the grave has closed for three-quarters of a century over the sorrows of Johnson, it is soothing to know that, in the midst of his miseries, the final days of their union were tranquil and full of consoling recollections to the survivor. If the course of events had not been favourable to their happiness, it had never extinguished their fondness. For years they had mingled minds and habits; the death of his wife disturbed the whole routine of his existence, and whichever way he turned there was a woeful blank. He endeavoured to dissipate grief by study, and it was observed that thenceforward he worked in a particular garret. When asked the reason he replied, "Because in that room alone I never saw Mrs. Johnson."⁴ He outlived her upwards of thirty years, and to the last he kept the anniversary of her death with fasting and prayer.7

Between March, 1753, and March, 1754, Johnson contributed a few essays to the *Adventurer*, which he allowed Dr. Bathurst, a physician of inconsiderable practice, to publish for his own advantage. Miss Williams told Boswell that Johnson "dictated them, while Bathurst wrote." Boswell professed to be "not quite satisfied with the casuistry by which the productions of one person were

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 76.] ² [*Ibid.*, p. 77.]

³ [*Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 148.]

⁴ [*Johnsoniana*, No. 314.]

passed upon the world for the productions of another.”¹ But they were published anonymously, and were not “passed upon the world for the productions” of either Johnson or Bathurst. Nor in private did Johnson pretend that they were by Bathurst, and he acknowledged at the time that they were his own, to one friend at least. Miss Boothby said, in a letter to him, December 4, 1753, “Some acquaintances of mine will have it that you sometimes write an *Adventurer*,” and she asked if this was true. “You have not answered my question in my last post-script,” she said, December 29; and, on February 16, 1754, she writes, “I wonder not at your hesitating to impart a secret to a woman. Such a mark of your confidence shall be strictly regarded, and I shall seek for letter T,² that I may read with redoubled pleasure.”³ Bathurst, on his part, did not claim the papers; and, in fact, they were never supposed to be his. The arrangement was only a delicate way of relieving his necessities. He could more readily accept the dictation of an essay than the two guineas which would have gone to him through Johnson’s hands, if Johnson had contributed in his own name. Johnson’s poverty was then extreme, but his charity was never extinguished by indigence, and he loved “dear, dear Bathurst better than he ever loved any human creature.”⁴ He repeated, with strong approval, an observation of Goldsmith: “I do not like a man who is zealous for nothing,”⁵ and he liked Bathurst for being “a good hater—he hated a fool, and he hated a rogue, and he hated a Whig.”⁶ Swift was of the same mind, and avowed it to be a ground of sympathy with Oldham—

That rogues and fools were both abhorred alike.

¹ [Boswell’s *Johnson*, p. 82.]

² [The signature which Johnson affixed to the *Adventurers* which he composed.]

³ [Miss Hill Boothby’s *Account of Johnson, etc.*, pp. 42, 46, 47.]

⁴ [*Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 18.]

⁵ [Boswell’s *Johnson*, p. 625.] ⁶ [*Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 83.]

But Bathurst could love as well as hate. He afterwards went to the West Indies, and in a letter which he wrote to Johnson from Barbadoes, in 1757, after stating that he prays to "the Supreme Being to enable him to deserve the friendship of so great and good a man," he says, "Excuse my dropping my pen, for it is impossible that it should express the gratitude that is due to you."¹

Cave, with whom Johnson had been so long connected, died in January, 1754. One of the last acts of the dying man, while sensibility remained, was fondly to press the hand of his illustrious friend.² A sketch of the life of this worthy bookseller was Johnson's only publication after the *Adventurer* stopped, till the *Dictionary* appeared in 1755. An incident which had little effect upon the current of his existence, but which is one of the famous passages in his history, was occasioned by the announcement of the work. He had dedicated the *Plan* to Lord Chesterfield, and received from him ten guineas. It was rather the discharge of a debt than a gift. Any rich man, at that time, who accepted a dedication from a needy author, paid him a fee of ten, or more commonly twenty guineas, and Lord Chesterfield was illiberal in giving the smaller sum for the compliment. In an interview with Johnson he showed him particular courtesy, and made great professions to him. He kept none of them, but for seven years took no notice of him whatever. Lord Chesterfield's defence was that "he did not know where Johnson lived," and that his servants did not inform him of Johnson's calls.³ The first excuse was plainly a pretence, and the hollowness of the first plea discredits the second. Mr. Croker suggested a further defence, and ascribed Lord Chesterfield's refusal to keep up a personal intercourse with Johnson to his having been attacked, just at the commencement of their

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 78, note, from Harwood's *History of Lichfield*.]

² [Johnson's *Life of Cave*, *Works*, vol. xii. p. 216.]

³ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 87.]

acquaintance, "by the disease which gradually estranged him from all society."¹ Years before he knew Johnson Lord Chesterfield was subject to occasional fits of giddiness, but they only kept him from society while they lasted, like any other passing illness. The infirmity which first estranged him from general society was a deafness which came upon him in April, 1752, when his total neglect of Johnson had gone on for four years. The apology does not apply, and had Lord Chesterfield been conscious of any such motive, he would have pleaded it to Dodsley, instead of assuring him that he would have turned off the best servant he ever had, if he had known that he had denied him to a man who would have been always more than welcome.² When the Dictionary was on the eve of coming out, he wrote a couple of papers in the *World*, in commendation of the scheme and its author. "While I was floating on a tempestuous sea," said Johnson, on that occasion, "he would not afford me the slightest succour, but when I got within sight of land, and almost touched the shore, he sent out two little frigates to my assistance."³ The device of Lord Chesterfield was to secure the dedication of the Dictionary by some propitiatory praise at the last, in spite of his practical renunciation of the author during the many painful years that the work was in progress. The haughty independence of Johnson could not brook a slight, and he would not accept a little public praise, as a compensation for deliberate and persevering private neglect. He wrote his celebrated letter to Lord Chesterfield, and renounced a patron who "could look with unconcern on a man struggling for life in the water, and when he had reached ground, encumbered him with help." Warburton, who was personally unknown to Johnson, sent a message, through a common acquaintance, to tell him that he honoured him for his manly behaviour.⁴

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 86, note.]

² [*Ibid.*, p. 87.]

³ [*Maloniana*, in Prior's *Life of Malone*, p. 355.]

⁴ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 86.]

Hawkins says that, in addition to writing the papers in the *World*, Lord Chesterfield tried to win over Johnson by sending a couple of friends to him with apologies for past neglect, and promises for the future. One of the two was Sir Thomas Robinson, who set about evincing his respect for Johnson by assuring him that, had his income permitted it, he would have settled on him £500 a year. "Sir," replied Johnson, "if the first peer in the realm were to make me such an offer, I would show him the way downstairs."¹ Sir Thomas's principal tried the seductive influence of actual money, with no better success. In the volume of "*Original Letters*," edited by Rebecca Warner, she states, in the introduction to some letters of Johnson's friend, Fowke, that Mr. Fowke was accustomed to relate that Lord Chesterfield sent Johnson £100 to induce him to dedicate the *Dictionary* to him, "which," said Johnson, "I returned with contempt." "Sir," he added, "I found I must have gilded a rotten post." Before he had experience of a patron, Johnson pictured him as a friendly, beneficent being, and was surprised to discover, as he told Lord Chesterfield, that he was,—what "the shepherd in Virgil found Love,"—harsh and pitiless, instead of tender, "a native of the rocks."² There is much in the *Rambler* on the faithlessness of patrons, to which Johnson's thoughts had been turned by Lord Chesterfield's neglect. Among the anonymous examples of false professions and broken pledges, his own case is nowhere exactly reproduced; but the resolution he formed is manifestly expressed in the final sentence of the essay entitled, "*The Conduct of Patronage: an Allegory*": "The Sciences, after a thousand indignities, retired from the palace of Patronage, and having long wandered over the world in grief and distress, were led at last to the Cottage of Independence, the daughter of Fortitude, where they were taught

¹ [Hawkins's *Life of Johnson*, p. 191.]

² [*Letter to Lord Chesterfield*.]

by Prudence and Parsimony to support themselves in dignity and quiet."¹

Johnson had undertaken to complete the Dictionary in three years, and afterwards maintained that he could have done it easily in two, if his health had not received several shocks during the period.² The protraction of the work through seven years was trying to the booksellers, and when the messenger returned from carrying the last sheet to Millar, Johnson enquired what he had said. "Sir," answered the man, "he said, 'Thank God I have done with him.'" "I am glad," rejoined Johnson, with a smile, "that he thanks God for anything."³ Even to have finished the work in the time which he actually took was a prodigious feat. A book so vast, upon a subject of indefinite extent, could not, as he was careful to proclaim, be perfect, and is to be judged by its general characteristics and not by particular defects. The etymologies are allowed to be the least satisfactory portion of the performance, though those who have remarked how little improvement has since been made upon them will be inclined to rate them higher than is commonly done. The interpretations of the words, if faulty in some instances, are more uniformly admirable than could, perhaps, have been produced by any other person. Johnson excelled in lucid explanation and exact definitions. The thought required for the purpose was very great, and he asserted that his mind was more on the stretch in compiling his Dictionary than in composing his poetry. The selection of examples was made with such a regard to their intrinsic excellence that Lord Brougham says the work is as interesting to read as it is useful to consult,⁴ and Malone considered its "Beauties" would form a pleasing volume by themselves.⁵ He was influenced in

¹ [*The Rambler*, No. 91, Jan. 29, 1751.]

² [*Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 53.]

³ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 94; Hawkins's *Life of Johnson*, p. 341.]

⁴ [Lord Brougham's *Lives of Men of Letters*, p. 358.]

⁵ [Malone, in Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 757, note.]

the choice of the authors he quoted by their religious opinions.¹ "I would not," he said to Mrs. Thrale, "send people to look for words in a book that might mislead them for ever." He even refused to cite Samuel Clarke because he was not entirely orthodox, though he read his sermons much in his latter days, and recommended them when he was dying for their fulness on the propitiatory sacrifice.² His Dictionary, with its manifold merits, was put together "amidst inconvenience and distraction, amidst sickness and sorrow,"³ when the calls of the press would not permit him to linger, and supply the defects of to-day by the research of to-morrow. As no one man could be conversant with the vocabulary of every art, science, and trade, he prepared the public in his preface to expect "a few wild blunders and risible absurdities."⁴ A lady asked him how he came to define *pastern* the *knee* of a horse, and he answered, "Ignorance, madam, pure ignorance."⁵ After the Dictionary of the French Academy had for two centuries undergone the revision of successive generations of the famous "forty," M. Arago entertained the Chamber of Deputies by exposing the absurd explanation it contained of some of the commonest terms of science.

The glow of satisfaction which animates the mind at the conclusion of a laborious undertaking was not felt by Johnson. Since the death of his wife he seemed to himself broken off from mankind—a gloomy gazer on a world to which he had little relation. To this he made an affecting allusion both in his letter to Lord Chesterfield and in the preface to his Dictionary. "The notice," he said in the first, "which you have been pleased to take of my labours, if it had been early, had been kind; but it has been delayed till I am indifferent and cannot enjoy it, till I am solitary and cannot impart it, till I am known

¹ Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 58.

² [*Ibid.*, p. 807.]

³ [*Preface to Dictionary*, Johnson's *Works*, vol. ii. p. 66.]

⁴ [*Ibid.*, p. 65.]

⁵ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 97.]

and do not want it.”¹ “I have protracted my work,” he said in the second, “till most of those whom I wished to please have sunk into the grave, and success and miscarriage are empty sounds. I therefore dismiss it with frigid tranquillity, having little to fear or hope from censure or praise.”² One of the departed friends whom he had wished to please was Edward Cave. Johnson had been countenanced by him in his obscurity, and was anxious that the publisher should witness his triumph. There had been reciprocal benefit and reciprocal obligation, which produced mutual esteem. Whatever might now be the lethargy of his mind, the pressure of poverty would not permit him to remain long inactive. The purchase-money of his Dictionary was all spent before the work was complete. The sum he received for it was £1,575, which was at the rate of £225 a year; but as he had to buy books and paper, and to pay the wages of six amanuenses who transcribed the authorities, the profit to himself was small indeed. His assistants often then, and afterwards, were pensioners upon his bounty, and encroached upon his own small share of the gain. “He had little,” said his servant Francis Barber, “for himself, but frequently sent money to Mr. Shiels when in distress.”³ Johnson later describes one of these humble associates as sitting starving for years by the bed of a sick wife, condemned by poverty to personal attendance, and by the necessity of attendance chained down to poverty. His wife sank at last, and before she was in her grave her husband followed her. Both were buried at the expense of Johnson. It is only here and there that we catch a sight of the domestic interior of the poor journeymen of literature, “who live men know not how, and die obscure men mark not when,” and what tragedies of life does the glance reveal!

Johnson did not complain of his bargain. Boswell once

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 86.]

² [Johnson's *Works*, vol. ii. p. 67.]

³ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 78.]

expressed a regret to him that he did not get more for his Dictionary. "I am sorry," he said, "too. But it was very well; the booksellers are generous, liberal-minded men."¹ At another time he said of the principal proprietor, "I respect Millar, sir; he has raised the price of literature."² Far, indeed, from thinking himself underpaid, it was the boast of Johnson that the next generation should not accuse him of having let down the wages of authorship.³ He always maintained that he had met with his deserts. He asserted, with especial reference to himself, that he never knew a man of merit neglected, and that all the accusations which were made against the world were unjust.⁴ This may not be universally true, but it is certain that those who deserve the most whine the least. The man who cries out that he is neglected, usually merits the neglect with which he meets. "I hate," said Johnson, "a complainer."⁵ People of his stamp have minds superior to fortune, and as he observed of Shakespeare in his low estate, "shake off its incumbrances like dew-drops from the lion's mane."⁶

Fortune was certainly not kind to him at this crisis. In March, 1756, he was arrested for a debt of £5 18s., and applied for assistance to Richardson, the novelist, who immediately responded to the appeal.⁷ Never callous to the distress of others in the midst of his own, he in the same year contributed to the *Universal Visitor*, for the purpose of helping poor Christopher Smart, who was one of the editors, and was then out of his mind. For a certain share of the profits of this monthly miscellany the poet bound himself to a bookseller to write nothing else for ninety-nine years; and Johnson was ignorant of the contract when he benevolently consented to hold the

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 100.]

² [*Ibid.*, p. 94.]

³ [*Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 51.]

⁴ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 715.]

⁵ [*Johnsoniana*, No. 560.]

⁶ [*Troilus and Cressida*, Act III., Sc. iii.]

⁷ [Murphy's *Essay*, in Johnson's *Works*, vol. i. p. 87.]

pen for his lunatic friend. "I hoped," he said, "his wits would soon return to him. Mine returned to me, and I wrote in the *Universal Visitor* no longer."¹ / He began, however, in May, to write on his own account for a new periodical, called the *Literary Magazine*. It was here that appeared his masterly review of the essay of Soame Jenyns, on the Origin of Evil, which he exposed with a force of sarcastic argument that, while it confuted the theory, rendered its author ridiculous. Jenyns kept silence as long as his antagonist lived; and thirty years afterwards, when he was dead, revenged himself in a puny epitaph in verse. / In addition to his other fugitive pieces Johnson wrote discourses for clergymen, and prefaces and dedications for authors. His price for a sermon was a guinea, and it took him only from dinner to post-time to earn it. Fame is a luxury, bread a necessity, and he was willing to make money by any method, however humble, provided it was honest. All his contrivances did not prevent his sinking lower in his circumstances. The father of Mr. Langton offered, if he would take Orders, to present him to a living of considerable value. "I have not," he replied, "the requisites for the office, and I cannot in conscience shear the flock which I am unable to feed."² "Sir," he said to his old fellow-collegian Edwards, who was sighing for what he called the easy life of a parson, "the life of a parson is not easy. No, sir, I do not envy a clergyman's life as an easy life, nor do I envy the clergyman who makes it an easy life."³ The retirement would have been as fatal to Johnson as the occupation was distasteful. His malady required the dissipating influence of society to keep it at bay; and his melancholy, in the stagnation of rural existence, would have passed into madness. He preferred to endure the evils of the scholar's lot, and continued, as Murphy says,

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, pp. 103, 445.]

² [Hawkins's *Life of Johnson*, p. 364.]

³ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 598.]

to pass his days "in poverty and the pride of literature."¹ This, in the main, was the life he led for a quarter of a century; but what can enable us to form an idea of the units of misery which made up the compound sum,—to realise the long-drawn bitterness of the waters of affliction as they fell drop by drop, day by day, without intermission or abatement?

He issued proposals in 1756 for an edition of Shakespeare, to be published by subscription; and, as he wrote little of any moment in 1757, he probably lived upon the payments which were made in advance by his patrons. A young bookseller, who carried him the stipulated sum, on behalf of a gentleman, asked if he would take down the address, that the name might be inserted in the list of subscribers. "Sir," replied Johnson, "I have two very cogent reasons for not printing a list of subscribers: one, that I have lost all the names; the other, that I have spent all the money."² This resource, which might answer while the scheme was new, and names came in thick, could not serve him long, and in April, 1758, he commenced the *Idler*, which appeared every Saturday in the *Universal Chronicle*, a weekly newspaper. The demands upon his time were not near so great as when he wrote his *Rambler*, and as his present papers were shorter, he had less than half the quantity to produce; but whether he was busy or at leisure, had to write little or much, his method was the same, which was to execute the work when it was wanted, and not an instant before. He asked Langton one evening, at Oxford, how long it was to post-time, and being told half an hour, he exclaimed, "Then we shall do very well." Upon this he scribbled off an *Idler*, which Langton expressed a desire to read. "Sir," said Johnson, as he folded it up, "you shall not do more than I have done myself."³ Company never checked his facility of composition. Mrs. Gastrell had

¹ [Murphy's *Essay*, in Johnson's *Works*, vol. i. p. 90.]

² [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 690.]

³ [*Ibid.*, p. 110.]

often known the printer's boy come to a house where Johnson visited for copy for the Rambler, when he would sit down at once in a room full of people and write an essay as readily as he would have written a reply to a note of invitation. A large part of the Lives of the Poets was composed at Stow Hill, at a table where several ladies were talking, and much of the remainder at his London lodging when George Steevens was in the room.

The Idler is traced with a lighter hand than the Rambler. But if the style is less tumid, the sentiments are in general less important. Far more passages embodying valuable truths in felicitous language could be collected from the early than from the later publication, which never attained the same reputation as its predecessor. While the series was in progress, he threw off in the evenings of a single week a work which far eclipsed the combined papers of the Idler,—the products though they were of two entire years. This was Rasselas, which was written in the spring of 1759, to defray the debts of his mother and pay the expenses of her funeral. Ardent as was his affection for her, it is believed that he had never seen her since he removed to London,—a space of more than twenty years. He told Mr. Langton, after the completion of the Dictionary, that she had counted the days for its publication, in the hope that he would then be free to visit her, and he expressed his resolution of going to Lichfield the moment he could extricate himself from his London engagements.¹ The hour when he had spare time or spare money never arrived, and in January, 1759, she expired at ninety years of age. On hearing of her illness, Johnson wrote her a letter commencing, "Honoured Madam," which was followed by others, in which he addressed her as "Dear honoured Mother."² These touching effusions of his heart are a striking testimony to the tenderness of his affection, for they are not in the least in his usual style, and seem more like the infantine fondness of a child

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 95.]

² [*Ibid.*, pp. 113, 114.]

that has never left its mother's side, than the expressions of a strong-minded man of fifty, who had been beating from youth about the world. He was so disturbed by the news of her death that he sent for Dr. Maxwell, the assistant preacher at the Temple, to help him to compose his agitated mind. In the last week of his life he burnt the letters he had received from her, and when they were consumed he shed a flood of tears. She was waited on in her illness by one Catherine Chambers, who had served her for upwards of thirty years. To this faithful attendant Johnson sent grateful messages, thanking her for her care of her mistress, expressing his value for her, and promising her his protection. In 1767, when her turn came to die, the great man was on a visit at Lichfield, and went "to take leave for ever of his dear old friend." The scene which ensued is described by himself in a diary never intended to be published. He sent away the attendants, told her that as Christians they ought to part with prayer, and having offered up a brief and fervent petition on her behalf, kissed her dying lips. "She said," he goes on, "that to part was the greatest pain she had ever felt, and that she hoped we should meet again in a better place. I expressed, with swelled eyes and great emotion of tenderness, the same hope. We kissed and parted, I humbly hope, to meet again and to part no more."¹ Hardly a man could be found who, with his eminence and in his position, would have shown this fondness to an old domestic, on account of the associations derived from her attention to his departed mother. Johnson hated the cant of sentiment, and the parade of feeling. He kept his griefs to himself, and we know them chiefly from the undesigned evidence of a few hasty memoranda.

↑ If the same kind of interest were expected in *Rasselas* as is found in a novel, it would be quickly flung aside. In its general structure it has all the defects of *Irene*. There are not many incidents, and nothing which deserves

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, pp. 115, 187.]

the name of a plot. The story is laid in the East ; but no attempt is made to impart a local colouring to the scene. The agents are speaking puppets, without distinctive attributes ; for, though Johnson had an insight into human nature, he had no capacity for making persons act and converse in character. All ranks and professions declaim in the same polished and ethical strain ; the princess talks as sagely as the philosopher, the maid as elegantly as her mistress, and none of them talk the language of life. *Rasselas*, in fact, is the *Rambler* in dialogue. In this aspect it is a work of great beauty and power. There are fewer commonplaces than in his essays, and the style is more chastened and condensed. Aphoristic wisdom has seldom been delivered in such finished and pointed sentences. In a long work, sententious maxims, unrelieved by moving accidents and the play of natural conversation, would produce satiety ; but he luckily stopped before the force of his lesson was weakened by repetition. Description is not the characteristic of *Rasselas*, but there is one example of it which is especially excellent. The languor and tedium of the luxurious life in the Happy Valley, where there is nothing to hope or to fear, are painted with a power which realises the sensation of the mind, and creates an oppressive, stifling feeling. The purpose of the story was well summed up by a lady, who remarked to Boswell, that it was a *Vanity of Human Wishes* in prose.¹ It is a fault in the execution of Johnson's design that he, for the most part, carries the Prince through scenes which do not exhibit the ordinary occupations of mankind, and he therefore fails to lay sufficient ground for his inference that happiness is nowhere to be found. The knowledge which he had acquired in his London life of the trials to which persons of all professions were exposed, would have enabled him to depict their hardships with unusual distinctness, and it is curious that he did not draw more

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 115.]

upon his own ample experience, and add at once to the force of his moral and the interest of his tale. It is still more singular that, after showing the impotence of earthly pursuits to confer peace, he should have omitted to proclaim, what we know was the dearest conviction of his mind, that religion would yield the felicity which is fruitlessly sought for elsewhere. "The conclusion in which nothing is concluded" is the title of his final chapter, and is a barren result to which to conduct the enquirer. /

(Of all the examples of Johnson's rapid composition, Rasselas is the most extraordinary, when the elaborate polish of the style is considered. In his *Life of Pope*, he observes that some authors shape a large amount of matter by continued meditation, and only write their productions when they have completed them.¹ This is said to have been his own method. Rasselas must already have been conceived and matured in his mind, and this is stated from positive information by Hawkins. "Finding that the Eastern tales written by himself in the *Rambler*, and by Hawkesworth in the *Adventurer*, had been well received, he had been for some time meditating a fictitious history of a greater extent, which might serve as a vehicle to convey his sentiments of human life and the dispensations of Providence, and having digested his thoughts on the subject, he obeyed the spur of that necessity which now pressed him."² / Bishop Percy had often heard him forming periods in low whispers when careless observers thought he was muttering prayers. / His short sight, which obliged him to hold his paper close to his face, made it irksome to him to write, while his retentive memory made it easy for him to retain what he had once conceived. Thus Percy supposes that he brought his pieces to the highest correctness, and then poured them out in the mass.³ It is certain that he pursued this plan to a considerable

¹ [Johnson's *Works*, vol. xi. p. 165.]

² [Hawkins's *Life of Johnson*, p. 366.]

³ [*Johnsoniana*, No. 531.]

extent, which takes something from the marvel of his apparent readiness; but nobody can imagine that he had all *Rasselas* by heart, or that he did otherwise than clothe a large part of the thoughts in the language of the moment. As he was above the charlatanry of pretending to a facility he did not possess, a remark which he made to Boswell is decisive. "When a man," he said, "writes from his own mind, he writes very rapidly. The greatest part of a writer's time is spent in reading in order to write; a man will turn over half a library to make one book."¹ If, however, he did not complete his compositions before he put them upon paper, he was gathering fresh ideas while his pen was idle, and his understanding was regaining its pristine vigour during his fits of inactivity. He wrote fast and well under pressure, because he did not come to his work with a jaded intellect, wearied and enfeebled by previous toil.

[*Rasselas* answered its primary end of supplying Johnson with money. He sold it for a hundred pounds, and got twenty-five more when it came to a second edition.] His expenses were reduced by the death of his wife and mother, and he appears to have diminished his literary labours in the same proportion. There is indeed the express testimony of Murphy, who knew him at this time, that he lived in total inaction.² "Want," he says in one of his essays, "always struggles against idleness, but want itself is often overcome; and every hour shows the careful observer those who had rather live in ease than plenty."³ The *Idler* stopped on the 5th of April, 1760, and except a few slight pieces, such as a preface or dedication, he published nothing more till after the memorable period which placed him at last above the alternative of perpetual privation or perpetual toil. Mr. Wedderburne suggested to the Prime Minister, Lord Bute, to confer

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 445.]

² [Murphy's *Essay* in Johnson's *Works*, vol. i. p. 90.]

³ [*The Idler*, No. 9.]

upon him a pension, and a grant was accordingly made to him, in July, 1762, of £300 a year. It is a remarkable illustration of the lofty spirit he had preserved throughout his adversity, that the man who had asked the favour did not dare to communicate his success for fear the proud independence of Johnson should resent it as an insult. Arthur Murphy undertook the task at Wedderburne's request. The message was disclosed by slow and studied approaches. When Johnson at length comprehended the fact, he made a long pause, then asked if it was seriously intended, and again fell into a profound meditation.¹ He was thinking, we may be sure, of the terrible struggle he was maintaining with poverty, for his chambers, Murphy says, were the abode of wretchedness; he was thinking of the rare felicity of a competence which would enable him at once to exchange misery for comfort; and he was thinking, as we know, whether it was fitting for him to accept the proffered bounty, and whether he ought not to prefer the pittance which he earned to the pounds which were a gift. But he had earned his pounds ten thousand times over; he had been a benefactor to the nation, and it was not just that the nation should leave him to starve. A great general is pensioned because the laurels which are reaped by the sword seldom bear much substantial fruit. A great writer who instructs and delights mankind is certainly as deserving as he who slays them; and as literature had not brought Johnson an adequate reward, he had as indisputable a claim to the small annuity bestowed upon him as any man has to the wages he receives for the work he has done. Better days have since dawned upon authors, but if they were as needy now as they were a hundred years ago, the Johnsons are not so numerous as to create an apprehension that their pensions would impoverish the national exchequer.

In spite of his rags and his garret, his didactic matter and unfashionable opinions, the stately censor of morals

¹ [Murphy's *Essay* in Johnson's *Works*, vol. i. p. 92.]

had already become, both with authors and public, the acknowledged head of the literary world. He had won the station by the sheer force of a powerful intellect which paid tribute to nothing but its own conclusions, and made him march right onwards regardless alike of persons and circumstances. / Murphy describes him, some years before his pension, as being waited on day after day by a crowd of poor authors who looked up to him as their oracle.¹ He heard their schemes and complaints, and dealt out from the chair of authority his criticisms and advice. What a testimony is this to his honesty, his benevolence, and his mental supremacy! What a proud position to be raised with tacit unanimity to the dictatorship in the midst of his beggary by the jealous population of Grub Street, who clung to him as their prop, like ivy gathered round an oak! His friendships with his great contemporaries may present a more imposing but not so touching a spectacle. His intimacies with these peers in fame had equally grown up in his needy time. Among his bosom companions, he could boast in Garrick, the greatest actor England ever saw; in Reynolds, the greatest painter; in Burke, the greatest statesman and orator. He had Goldsmith, who had not yet published the works which have made him immortal, but whose genius with the intuition of kindred genius Johnson saw and encouraged. He had Langton, "much renowned for Greek," and Beauclerk, much renowned for sprightly anecdote and satirical wit. Langton, when under twenty, had got introduced to him out of admiration for his Rambler, and afterwards brought Beauclerk, who was a fellow-undergraduate at Oxford. He loved the society of these lively and well-informed men, whose youthful elasticity helped to dissipate his gloom. No one could venture to take such liberties with him as Beauclerk. The year after his pension was conferred he made the most important acquaintance of all, that of the inimitable biographer to whom he owes a large

¹ [Murphy's *Essay* in Johnson's *Works*, vol. i. p. 88.]

part of his fame. The clouds which hung about his fortunes, and the obscurity which enveloped his life, were dispersed together. From the hour of his prosperity he stands out in the broad glare of day, and we know him in the most private recesses of his mind, in his minutest actions, and his most familiar words. The treasures we have make us lament the treasures we have lost—the strange scenes of Grub Street life, the years of vigorous talk, the dramatic social contests, and the countless witty repartees. But Boswell, who was unborn when Johnson came to London, did not make his appearance with his note-book till 1763, and what was probably the most curious chapter of his hero's history is buried in oblivion.

Johnson was fifty-four when his pension was bestowed upon him, and he lived to enjoy it for twenty-two years. One of the earliest uses he made of it was highly characteristic. He never went into the street without a store of small coin to give to the beggars.¹

He rented a house in Gough Square before the death of his wife, which poverty subsequently compelled him to vacate. He had now rooms in the Temple, and soon exchanged them for a separate tenement in Bolt Court, where he collected a little colony of outcasts. In the garret lodged Robert Levett, whom he brought with him from the Temple.

This humble practitioner of medicine began life as a waiter at a French coffee-house frequented by surgeons, who, observing his interest in their conversation, subscribed to get him educated to their own profession. When he was past fifty a woman of the town, whom he met in a coal-shed in Fetter Lane, persuaded him to marry her by pretending that she was heiress to a fortune. Shortly afterwards she was tried for picking pockets, and a writ was taken out against Levett for her debts. A separation ensued, and Johnson gave shelter to the poor duped husband to the end of his days. His appearance was uncouth and grotesque, his manner stiff and

¹ [Hawkins's *Life of Johnson*, p. 395.]

awkward. He rarely spoke when anyone was present, and Boswell says his abilities were moderate, but Johnson described him as a man who took an interest in everything, and was always ready at conversation. He sat with his benefactor during the whole of his protracted breakfast, made the tea for him, and shared his roll. The practice of Levett was extensive, but it was confined to the lower orders, who sometimes paid him in victuals. Boswell wondered what could be the attractions of such a companion. "He is poor and honest," replied Goldsmith, "which is recommendation enough to Johnson." Levett died after living with him for thirty years, and his generous protector, who had always treated him with marked kindness and courtesy, wrote to Langton, "How much soever I valued him, I now wish I had valued him more." The lines which he composed on the occasion are among the most pathetic in the language. They are a faithful description of Levett's character and calling, and out of the very lowliness of his occupation, and the rusticity of his manner, Johnson gathers materials for dignified and affecting praise.¹

The room on the ground-floor of the house was occupied by Miss Williams, the daughter of a Welsh medical man, who, excited like hundreds of other projectors by the offer by Parliament of a reward for ascertaining the longitude at sea, had spent thirty years upon a fanciful scheme for the purpose. Johnson wrote the pamphlet for him in which his futile theory was expounded to the public, and Mrs. Johnson contracted a friendship for his daughter. Miss Williams was afflicted with a disorder in her eyes which required an operation, and the good man took her home to Gough Square that she might be properly cared for. Instead of recovering she became totally blind, and she remained an inmate of Johnson's house till he was driven into chambers. She returned when his reviving

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, pp. 78, 125, 143, 173, 569, 703, 735; Hawkins's *Life of Johnson*, p. 399.]

fortune again enabled him to have a separate residence, and lived partly on his bounty, and partly on her other slender resources. Once when he heard her remark that she had not made a purchase for want of money, he asked her why she did not apply to him. "Because," said she, "I knew you had none." "But I could have borrowed it," was his reply. "He never," she said, "refused his purse to anyone."¹ As Levett attended at the midday breakfast-table, so it was her function to preside at the midnight tea. Even when Johnson lived in the Temple she always sat up for him at her lodging, where he stopped on his way from his late conversations, and indulged, as he sipped his favourite beverage, in another spell of talk. She was well versed in literature, and expressed her ideas in good language, though a hesitation in her speech took something from the charm. Johnson said of her after her death, in 1783, when she had been his companion for thirty years, "that had she possessed good humour, and prompt elocution, her universal curiosity and comprehensive knowledge would have made her the delight of all who knew her." Her peevishness was excessive, and Boswell often wondered at the patience with which it was borne by her host. Her irritability increased with age, and Johnson, who endured it himself without a murmur, had to bribe the maid to stay with her, by a secret stipulation of half-a-crown a week in addition to her wages. Before sickness had enfeebled her, she chiefly waited on herself; for, though she had not lost her sight till womanhood, she had the perseverance when she was blind to recommence her education, and train her touch to supply the place of a second sense. She was expert in the use of her needle, and made her own clothes. In early life she had been connected with Stephen Grey, the poor brother of the Charterhouse, who has left a name in electrical science; and she says, in a note to a poem addressed to him, that while "assisting him in his experi-

¹ Lady Knight, *European Magazine*, Oct., 1799.

ments, she was the first who ever observed the emission of the spark from the human body." The piece in which the fact was commemorated bore evident marks of the same hand which produced *London*, and Boswell intimated his conviction to Miss Williams. "Sir," said she, with warmth, "I wrote that poem before I had the honour of Dr. Johnson's acquaintance." When Boswell repeated the assertion to Johnson, he answered, "It is true that she wrote it before she was acquainted with me; but she has not told you that I wrote it all over again except two lines."¹

To these inmates were afterwards added a Miss Carmichael and Mrs. Desmoulins. Of the first nothing is known; the last was the widow of a writing-master and daughter of Dr. Swinfen, the godfather of Johnson. Besides her house-room she was allowed by her protector half a guinea a week, which, Boswell remarks, was more than a twelfth part of his pension.² At the time when he resided much with the Thrales, he returned every Saturday to his adopted family to give them three days of good living before he went back to Streatham on Monday night.³ If he dined with Boswell at a tavern in town, he always sent home a ready-dressed delicacy to Miss Williams. While he was thus beneficent and considerate to all of them, they were all obnoxious to each other. "Williams," he wrote to Mrs. Thrale, "hates everybody; Levett hates Desmoulins, and does not love Williams; Desmoulins hates them both; Poll loves none of them."⁴ Levett hated Desmoulins so much that he begged Johnson to turn her out of doors. Poll was Miss Carmichael; she had been introduced into the circle in the expectation that she would enliven the rest, and was soon involved in the general fray. The negro Frank contributed to the discord. He had been in the service of

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, pp. 74, 143, 181, 503, 537, 738.]

² [*Ibid.*, pp. 14, 570.]

³ [*Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 85.]

⁴ [Johnson to Mrs. Thrale, Nov. 14, 1778; *Letters*, vol. ii. p. 38.]

Dr. Bathurst, and his present patron, when much too poor to indulge in the luxury of a footman, had received him out of love for his former master. Johnson treated him more as a friend than a domestic. He sent him to a boarding-school in his youth, and again after he had attained to man's estate. In the letters he wrote to him in his absence he addresses him as "Dear Francis," and subscribes himself "affectionately yours." Frank complained incessantly of the tyranny of Miss Williams, and Miss Williams complained of the negligence of Frank. "This is your scholar," she would exclaim, tauntingly, to Johnson, "on whose education you have spent £300."¹ That anything should be spent on one pensioner was always wormwood to the rest, and a common cause of their ceaseless enmities. Their generous benefactor, who, as Hawkins says, almost divided his income among them, was often afraid to go home and face the Babel of dissension which awaited him. When their blood was up, he himself was not always spared.² Now and then he seems to have watched the contest with dramatic interest, for he once writes to Mrs. Thrale, "To-day Williams and Desmoulins had a scold, and Williams was going away, but I bade her not turn tail, and she came back, and rather got the upper hand."³ Much as he used to lament that his life was rendered miserable from the impossibility of making his dependents happy, if anyone else spoke a word against them he would palliate their conduct, and would tell Mrs. Thrale that she could not make allowances for situations she had never experienced. Or sometimes, when his friends expressed their wonder at his forbearance, he would answer, "If I did not shelter them no one else would, and they would be lost for want."⁴ There may be persons in the world who would be willing to give as

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, pp. 77, 194; Hawkins's *Life of Johnson*, p. 328.]

² [Hawkins's *Life of Johnson*, p. 408.]

³ [To Mrs. Thrale, Oct. 31, 1778; *Letters*, vol. ii. p. 28.]

⁴ [*Johnsoniana*, No. 279.]

largely as Johnson, but how many would be found to make their abodes the residence of quarrelsome pensioners, who should fill the house with clamour from kitchen to garret, and whose sole claim should be that nobody else would put up with them for an hour? Yet this Johnson did for twenty years, and did it as a simple act of course, without ostentation or boast. Who that had read his noble writings, or heard at some dinner his unrivalled talk, would have guessed that these poor creatures would be his chosen companions, the sharers of his home, his purse, and his time?

When Johnson, in 1756, issued proposals for his edition of Shakespeare, he promised that it should be published before Christmas, 1757. In the execution of every work of length hindrances are sure to interpose, of which the mind, after repeated experience of failure, takes no account beforehand. The principal hindrance with Johnson was indolence. His time was passed in the vacillation between intention and performance. Grainger wrote to Percy that he paid the subscription-money for the Shakespeare by instalments, because the editor never dreamt of working while he had a couple of guineas in his pocket.¹ The grant of his pension did not increase his disposition for labour, and his undertaking was at a standstill. Churchill, in his wretched piece of doggerel called "The Ghost," accused him of cheating. Johnson, who was indifferent to abuse, especially to such brutal ribaldry as was displayed in the character of Pomposo, where he is described as

Not quite a beast, not quite a man,²

did not permit the attack to quicken his pen.³ His friends grew alarmed for his credit, and Sir Joshua Reynolds

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 171, note.]

² [Churchill's *Ghost*, book iii. v. 828.]

³ Churchill died November 4, 1764, and a notice of him in the Annual Register for that year says that "Johnson's opinion being asked concerning his poems, he allowed them but little merit, which being told the author, he resolved to requite this private opinion with a public one. In his next poem, therefore, the Ghost, he has drawn this gentleman under the character

entangled him into laying a wager that he would complete his edition by a certain time.¹ Pride then got the better of indolence, and the book appeared in 1765, nine years after it was ostensibly begun. Johnson wrote to Joseph Warton that as he felt no solicitude about the work, he felt no comfort from its conclusion.² His sole satisfaction was that the public had no further claim upon him. A commentary thus reluctantly and hastily finished was of necessity imperfect. No force of mind can supply the materials which can only be derived from research. He was aware that the old copies had never been properly collated, and this task he undertook to perform. He was sensible that much of what was obscure in the text arose from the words and allusions having grown obsolete with time. The great excellence, he said, of Shakespeare was that he drew his scenes from nature, and reflected the manners and language of the world which was passing before his eyes. He was, therefore, full of colloquial phrases, which succeeding fashion had swept away, and of references to the traditions and superstitions of the vulgar, which must be traced before they could be understood. Johnson promised to study Shakespeare through the works of his contemporaries, and explain the ambiguities by placing himself in the midst of his author's generation.³ When he came to execute his design, he neither read the old books nor was particularly nice in the comparison of the old copies. Yet he did much; his text was the purest which had hitherto appeared; his strong sense rejected the conjectural licence of Pope and War-

of Pomposo." The vituperative personalities, which were the salt that seasoned his pieces, are of a secondary order. He abandoned the nice discrimination of traits, the poignant representation of veritable qualities, for the barbarous invective in which likeness is lost in the bitterness of rancour. Where likeness ceases, satire ends, and slander takes its place.

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 171, note.]

² [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 172.]

³ [Johnson's *Proposal for Printing the Works of Shakespeare*, 1756; *Works*, vol. ii. pp. 70-74.]

burton, and his sagacity supplied some admirable emendations of his own. Though he had not gone for his explanations to the Elizabethan literature, he disentangled a variety of intricate passages by the force of his understanding. In conciseness and perspicuity of expression his notes are a model, and one by which succeeding editors have not usually profited. His famous Preface has never been relished by those whose idolatry of Shakespeare overpowers their judgment, and who can canonise his faults out of admiration for his beauties. Exceptions may be taken to one or two of Johnson's positions, and he has certainly not done justice to the poetical side of his author's character; but he praises him to the height of his greatness as a delineator of nature, and in language which, though sometimes redundant, is still magnificent. But the crowning excellence of the Preface is the passage in which he refutes the accepted dogma that unity of time and place was essential to dramatic probability, and by pushing the principle upon which the assumption rests to its extreme consequences, shows, with invincible logic and poignant wit, that it was not only false, but ridiculous.¹

The malady which preyed upon the mind of Johnson, and from which he was never wholly free, attacked him at this period with redoubled violence. He notices in his journal, on Good Friday, 1764, that he knows not what has become of the last year, that a strange oblivion has fallen upon him, and that incidents and intelligence leave no impression on his mind.² He repeats this account on Easter Day, 1765. "My memory grows confused, and I know not how the days pass over me. Good Lord, deliver me!"³ He was accustomed to seek in society diversion from his gloom. The disorder grew too strong for the remedy; and company is an aggravation when it ceases to be a cure. He secluded himself from all but his particular friends; and Dr. Adams found him sighing,

¹ [Johnson's *Works*, vol. ii. p. 95.]

² [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 165.]

³ [*Ibid.*, p. 167.]

groaning, talking to himself, and restlessly walking from room to room. "I would consent," he said, "to have a limb amputated to recover my spirits."¹ Though he had intervals of comparative calm, his malady continued to gather strength, till, in 1766, he kept to his room for weeks together, and protested with agony that he was on the verge of insanity. In the previous year he had made the acquaintance of the Thrales. They now carried him to Streatham, and in the comfortable villa of the wealthy brewer, and the cheerful society of his lively wife, Johnson recovered his equanimity and health. From this hour he was made one of the family. He came and went as he pleased. A room was appropriated to him, distinguished guests were invited to meet him, and he experienced what he had never known before—the blended charm of domestic luxury and intellectual society. He who had made his house the home of the destitute, found in compensation a retreat for himself.

His life now passed in as even a tenor as his constitutional depression would permit. He laid aside his pen, and only wrote an occasional trifle to oblige a friend, till, in 1770, he produced his first political pamphlet, *The False Alarm*. This was the term he applied to the outcry which arose after Wilkes had been expelled from Parliament. At the general election of 1768 he had been elected Member for Middlesex. On February 3, 1769, he was expelled the House for having published certain impious, coarse, and seditious libels. He was re-elected on February 16 without opposition, and the House of Commons resolved, on February 17, "That John Wilkes, Esq., having been in this session of parliament expelled this House, was and is incapable of being elected a Member to serve in this present parliament." On the 16th of March Wilkes was a third time elected without opposition, and the House of Commons, on the 17th, voted that the election was "null and void." At the fourth election, in

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 165.]

April, the Ministry put up a rival candidate, Colonel Luttrell, who polled 296 votes, and Wilkes 1,143. The House of Commons held that the votes for Wilkes were a nullity, and resolved that Colonel Luttrell was duly elected. "The electors of Middlesex," says Burke, "chose a person whom the House of Commons had voted incapable, and the House of Commons took in a Member whom the electors of Middlesex had not chosen."¹ The text books of law enumerated the circumstances which disqualified a person to sit in the House of Commons. The offences of Wilkes were not among the number. Those who combated the resolution which pronounced him incapable of being a Member said that the creation of an incapacity unknown to the law was a legislative and not a judicial act, and that the House of Commons, in making a law under the pretence of declaring it, was usurping a function which it could only exercise in conjunction with the king and the House of Lords. The true point at issue was which of the two, the House of Commons or the elective body, was the supreme tribunal to decide upon the fitness of a candidate not disqualified by law. Some of the highest authorities allowed it to be the customary privilege of the House to express its conviction, by expulsion, that a person, not legally incapacitated, was unfit to be a Member, but they contended that his constituents might re-elect him, and that the choice could not be invalidated by a second expulsion. "It seems," says Johnson, "to be the opinion of many that expulsion is only a dismissal of the representative to his constituents with such a testimony against him as his sentence may comprise, and that if his constituents should again choose him, as still worthy of their trust, the House cannot refuse him."² The opposite doctrine would be a serious encroachment on the rights of the electors. A House of Commons, in which the majority could pass votes at discretion either of expulsion

¹ [Burke's *Works*, ed. 1808, vol. ii. p. 304.]

² [Johnson's *Works*, vol. viii. p. 77.]

for incapacity, might eject opponents whose real crime was that they represented the views of the people. This was notoriously the cause of the proceedings against Wilkes. He was popular with the multitude, and the object was to suppress a troublesome demagogue. The discussions on the Middlesex election prevented the precedent from being followed. The majority persevered in their vote against Wilkes, but the House of Commons did not renew its claim to create incapacities at its discretion, and it is now generally admitted that the pretension was illegal.

Strong as were Johnson's political convictions, they would not alone have tempted him to interpose in the debate. A feeling that he ought to aid the Government of the Sovereign to whom he owed his pension undoubtedly weighed with him. His pamphlet, which fills thirty pages, was commenced at the house of Thrale one Wednesday evening at eight o'clock, and finished by twelve on the Thursday night. It is among his best productions, for few have ever equalled him in gladiatorial skill. He always began by stripping a question of its imaginary importance, and reducing it to its smallest dimensions. "The freeholders of Middlesex," he said, "are deprived of a Briton's birthright—representation in parliament. They have; indeed, received the usual writ of election, but that writ, alas! was malicious mockery, for there was one man excepted from their choice. Every lover of liberty stands doubtful of the fate of posterity, because the chief county in England cannot take its representative from a jail."¹ But in thus ridiculing the declamation of the patriots, he did not evade their more sober arguments. He stated them honestly, and grappled with them manfully. In the vulgar phrase, he takes the bull by the horns, and, whether he throws him or not, never turns from the real foe to wrestle with shadows. His tone to his opponents was bold and uncompromising. Sarcastic wit, taunt, irony, contempt, all abound in this spirited pamphlet, which has

¹ [Johnson's *Works*, vol. viii. p. 66.]

more ease of style and simplicity of language than anything he had written.

The False Alarm had great success, and he followed it up, the next year, with his still abler dissertation on the Falkland Islands. Spain had forced the English settlers to evacuate Port Egmont. England compelled Spain to disavow the attack, and to restore the port she had taken. In making the restoration she stipulated that it should not affect the question of her right to the islands; and the Opposition maintained that, rather than have allowed the reservation, the British Government should have gone to war. This narrow subject, when revolved in the mind of Johnson, becomes fertile in interest. He gives a history of the islands, shows the worthlessness of the possession, and the insignificance of the objections to the arrangement which had been concluded, and then draws a picture of the horrors of war. He told Boswell that he thought the subtlety of disquisition upon constitutional points in the first pamphlet was worth all the fire in the second.¹ But the impressive description of the miseries entailed by an appeal to arms entitles the last to the palm.

He twice again entered the lists. There was a general election in 1774, and he wrote one Saturday, in obedience to a request from some friends on the previous day, an essay called "The Patriot," in which he described the characteristics of the true patriot and the false. His final effort was his more ambitious "Taxation no Tyranny," to prove the right of the English Parliament to tax the Americans without their consent. This appeared in 1775, and is written with greater grandiloquence and less spirit than any of his pamphlets. He, as usual, goes straight to the mark, laughs at the doctrines of his opponents, and assumes a tone of triumph in his arguments. But the power is hardly equal to the pretension. It failed to make the American partisans as angry as he hoped. "I think," he said, "I have not been attacked enough for it. Attack

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 227.]

is the reaction. I never think I have hit hard unless it rebounds."¹ Next to praise there were few things which he liked better than abuse. "I hope," he once remarked, "the day will never arrive when I shall neither be the object of calumny nor ridicule, for then I shall be neglected and forgotten."²

The next important incident in Johnson's history was his visit to the Western Islands of Scotland. He always held that there was little to be learned from travelling, and once, when Boswell urged him to make a tour to Ireland and asked, in answer to the aversion he expressed to the project, "Is not the Giant's Causeway worth seeing?" he replied by the admirable distinction, "Worth seeing?—yes; but not worth going to see."³ His desire, nevertheless, to go to the Hebrides had long existed. He had read in his boyhood Martin's account of these islands, and the impression it made on his young imagination had remained. He was curious in life and manners, and fancied that he should find a primitive people, with characters and habits as yet uninfluenced by the modifying effects of civilisation.⁴ But his own impulses would not have got the better of his love of London and ease, if Boswell had not employed his persuasions and those of his friends to set him in motion. The tour was made in the autumn of 1773, and the work which resulted from it was composed in the following year. His travels had answered expectation in the pleasure they afforded, for the constant change of place and company was the best medicine for his melancholy. In conversation he once asserted that the intellectual benefit had been equally great, that he had witnessed a novel system of life, and had gained a vast accession of ideas.⁵ In his book he acknowledged that the supposition that he should witness another phase of society was not fulfilled, and he concluded he had gone

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 442.]

² [*Johnsoniana*, No. 390.]

³ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 638.]

⁴ [*Ibid.*, p. 267; *Works*, vol. viii. p. 205.]

⁵ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 723.]

too late, when intercourse had already assimilated the inhabitants to the rest of the world. Man, however, is always man, and those who have visited remote countries have never had much to tell of him that is new. Disappointed in his anticipations, there was little left for Johnson to observe. Works of art there were none, and, if there had been, he had neither taste nor eyesight for them. Scenery was almost a blank to him, and he despised it in consequence. "Never heed such nonsense," he exclaimed when Mr. Thrale called his attention to a prospect in France; "a blade of grass is always a blade of grass; if we *do* talk, let us talk about something: men and women are my subjects of enquiry."¹ But a few poor lairds and rustics could not supply many topics for a book. The theme was as barren as the islands, and to look for a throng of incidents and local discoveries in Johnson's "Journey" was to demand from the subject what it could not yield. He compensated for the deficiencies by general speculations, which form the real interest and value of the work, and bear the impress of his acute and vigorous understanding. He observed to Boswell that everybody commended the parts which were in their own line of study. Sir William Jones praised the portion which treated of language; "all-knowing Jackson," a Member of Parliament, the observations on trade; and Burke the account of the dwellers in mountainous districts. Mr. Croker inferred that Johnson had fallen into the error of imagining Ireland to be generally mountainous, or else of supposing that Burke was from a mountainous part of it. The criticism must have been penned in forgetfulness of the purport of the passage, which is a description of the effect of natural barriers upon the habits and institutions of a people, and interested the great statesman as a philosophic politician, and not because he himself had been a resident among rocks.² The "Journey" contains some of

¹ [*Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 100.]

² [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 540 and note; *Works*, vol. viii. p. 258 *seq.*]

Johnson's best composition, and the style is well adapted to the frequent disquisitions. For the trivial incidents of the narrative it is too formal and stately, and it is difficult to understand how a man of his literature should have been insensible to the defect, and not have felt the necessity of lowering his manner to his subject. He had a high opinion of his work, for when, in reply to his observation "that it had not had a large sale," Boswell remarked, "That is strange," he answered, "Yes; for in that book I have told the world a good deal they did not know before."¹ Notwithstanding his assertion to the contrary, the sale was considerable. Cadell, the publisher, told Hannah More that 4,000 copies went off the first week.² The Scotch, indignant at his representations of the backward state of the country, regarded him as a malignant intruder, who had come to spy the nakedness of their land, and were loud in their censures. He wondered at their sensitiveness, and made himself merry with their abuse.³ Mrs. Thrale relates that he was never known to bear the least ill will to an opponent.⁴

Johnson's antipathy to the Scotch was probably much exaggerated. He had some aversion to particular national traits, but it was far outweighed by his personal likings, and his distaste for one or two peculiarities was much less than has often been felt by other men. "I have been trying all my life," says Charles Lamb, "to like Scotchmen, and am obliged to desist from the experiment in despair." He was impatient of their prolixity, and their literal interpretation of metaphors, irony, and flights of fancy.⁵ The exaggerated clanship of Scotchmen, and their undue preference for everything Scotch, was the characteristic which specially called forth Johnson's conversational rebukes; and, without a particle of bitterness,

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 606.]

² [*Memoirs of Hannah More*, vol. i. p. 39.]

³ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 432.]

⁴ [*Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 262.]

⁵ ["Imperfect Sympathies," Lamb's *Elia*.]

and little real antipathy, he had a pleasure in mortifying Scotch pretensions by his sarcastic wit. He indulged in the topic beyond what he felt, because it afforded him an inexhaustible theme for brilliant repartee. If we were to judge him by his conduct to individuals, and not by his words, we should rather conclude that he had a partiality for Scotchmen, and what there was of real dislike to their national character was partly justified by reason, and the rest readily accounted for by the general prejudice of the age.

The journey to the Hebrides appears to have given Johnson a taste for jaunts. He accompanied the Thrales in a visit to North Wales in 1774, and to France in 1775. Neither tour produced any lasting result. A far more memorable event, and in its consequences one of the most remarkable in his career, was when a deputation from the booksellers waited on him in 1777, and requested him to furnish the *Lives* for a new edition of the English Poets. He was delighted with the proposal, and when he was told to name his own remuneration, he mentioned two hundred guineas. Malone wonders at his moderation, and says if he had asked a thousand or fifteen hundred guineas it would have been readily granted. But his original design was limited to a concise account of each author, and the scheme expanded in the execution.¹ "I always said," he remarked, when his task was done, "that the booksellers were a generous set of men. The fact is not that they have paid me too little, but that I have written too much." They ultimately gave him twice the sum for which they had agreed.² Boswell thought it derogatory that he should provide a preface to any author they might be pleased to select, and enquired whether he would do it to the poems of a dunce. "Yes, sir," he replied, "and say he was a dunce."³ A portion of the work was published in 1779, and the remainder was com-

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 530, 531.]

² [*Ibid.*, p. 665.]

³ [*Ibid.*, p. 540.]

pleted in March, 1781. Altogether it employed him for nearly four years. "I wrote it," he says, "in my usual way, dilatorily and hastily, unwilling to work, and working with vigour and haste." The moral purpose to be served by his *Lives* was always present to his mind, and he hoped they "had been penned in such a manner as might tend to the promotion of piety."¹ Their success was immense. He announced to one of his friends that nothing he ever published had been more generally commended, and that the world was never more willing to caress him. A few persons were angry that a friend or a favourite had not been rated sufficiently high. Such objections he had expected, and told Boswell he would rather be attacked than unnoticed. "The worst thing," he went on, "you can do to an author is to be silent as to his works. An assault upon a town is a bad thing, but starving it is still worse."² Even this was an abatement of his ordinary tone. He usually held, as we have seen, that the assault was an advantage. "Fame," he was wont to remark, "is a shuttlecock, which must be struck at both ends or it falls to the ground."³ The works which are killed by criticism are those which would speedily die a natural death. He heard the clamour which was raised against his *Lives* with perfect indifference. "I considered myself," he said, "as entrusted with a certain portion of truth. I have given my opinion sincerely; let them show where they think me wrong."⁴

The *Lives of the Poets* were written in a happy hour, when Johnson was at the zenith of his powers, and just before his health began to give way. His understanding had gone on maturing, and his composition improving, to advanced years, when if the faculties of most persons do not decline, they are at least at a standstill. There is no other work in the language equally great that has been produced between the age of sixty-eight and

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 665.]

² [*Ibid.*, p. 624.]

³ [*Ibid.*, p. 403.]

⁴ [*Ibid.*, p. 675.]

seventy-two. Without having formed the project, he had been gathering materials for it all his days. He loved in conversation to descant upon the poets, to draw with nice discrimination the characters of men, and to enunciate maxims of conduct. By long experience and reflection he had stored his mind with a vast body of critical opinions and observations upon life.

The project of the booksellers caught him exactly when the tide had risen to its highest, and before it commenced to ebb, and enabled him to embody the accumulations of wisdom and literature which would otherwise have died with him. He had no turn for minute research, was negligent of dates, and was not eager to learn more of the history of his authors than he already knew. If he had been more laborious he would have added something to the completeness, but nothing to the sterling value and interest of his work. These consist in the skill of his narrative, and in his views of books and men. It is not the novelty of the facts which makes in general a great biography; its greatness depends upon the style which adorns and the comments which illuminate it. Johnson is never guilty of the fraud, which is practised by petty writers, of attempting to hide his ignorance by an assumption of knowledge. When he criticises a poem from faint recollection, or from casual glances, he is scrupulous in confessing it. Nobody could allege of him that his works were more learned than their author.

The style of Johnson in the Lives of the Poets retains his dignity and classical polish, with hardly a trace of his cumbrous march. His periods, which from his mode of punctuation look long to the eye, are frequently a compound of short and pithy sentences, as animated as they are energetic. His metaphors, in which he was always happy, are apt and concise, and illustrate while they embellish. His wit is abundant, and of a kind peculiar to himself,—a species of concentrated sarcasm, by which he exposes faults, whether of men or their writings. His

censure derives much of its point and sparkle from its directness, from the uncompromising fearlessness with which he holds up errors and false pretences to ridicule and scorn. Without demanding heroic excellence from fallible beings, he is not upon the whole a tender judge. His prevailing love of truth would only permit him to see men as they were. He could not be an apologist of what he knew to be blameable, nor draw an ideal portrait of an author for the purpose of exalting him to the level of his works. No one had a more piercing insight into character than Johnson. He was not to be imposed upon by the smoothness of the husk; he went straight to the kernel, and is never more excellent than when he is stripping off the cloak from hypocrisy. This deep penetration, and the sagacious reflections which everywhere abound, make the human interest of his *Lives* equal, if not superior, to their literary criticism. In the latter particular indeed, to hear the language which is sometimes used, it might be supposed that they were an ignominious failure,—a collection of blind prejudices and false decrees, which only exhibit his defective taste and dictatorial insolence. The sole ground of this absurd idea is that he did not admire sufficiently the minor poems of Milton, the *Castle of Indolence* of Thomson, and the *Odes* of Collins and Gray. There have always been two schools of poetry,—one which addresses itself to the imagination, the other to the reason. Few persons are possessed of the catholic taste which relishes both. Johnson belonged to the school of reason, and had little appreciation of rural images and the flights of fancy. Those who have attacked him for his insensibility did not perceive that their own was greater; that if they applauded what he condemned, they likewise condemned what he applauded, and that he did not depreciate a few of their favourite pieces so much below their real level as they themselves underrated the works of Dryden and Pope. No injustice committed by him approaches the injustice with which

he has been treated. The parts of his book which are open to exception are only a fraction of the whole; the bulk of it consists of criticism which, for acuteness of discrimination, warmth of praise, justness of censure, and force of expression, is still unrivalled. No one has discoursed of *Paradise Lost* with such splendour of eulogy, and a nicer sense of its grandeur and defects. No one has approached him in the combination of truth and power with which he has written upon Dryden, Addison, and Pope. No one has ever produced a more masterly analysis than that in which he takes to pieces the conceits of Cowley, and shows their talent on the one hand and their radical faults upon the other. There is not a single book in the whole range of English literature which contains so many original and irreproachable canons of criticism,¹ or which could be of equal assistance to students in forming their taste, and directing them in the en-

¹ Upon this point there cannot be a more unexceptionable authority than Sir Egerton Brydges, who was endowed by nature with a fine taste which had been much cultivated by reading, and who was so far from leaning to the school of Johnson that he belonged to the opposite faction, and by his own confession "was too angry with him for his treatment of Collins and Gray to be able for many years to give him credit for the parts of his work which were so admirable." Yet it is thus that he writes of the obnoxious critic, when time had enabled him to read his works with impartial eyes: "He was a very great man; a profound and eloquent moralist; a sagacious, discriminative, and elegant biographer; and an original, solid, and penetrating critic; though, sometimes, in light cases, a little capricious and humoursome. In that part of his *Lives of the Poets* which has no concern with his contemporaries, his taste is generally as sure as his observations are ingenious and deep, his disquisitions powerful, his distinctions acute and new, and his knowledge of life surprisingly piercing and just. His masterly development of principles; the order, clearness, and force of his mind; the readiness and aptitude of his applications; the strength of his argumentative powers; and the severe integrity of his judgments, have made the matter of those lives such a standard of wisdom, such a thick woven web of golden ore, that nothing can break it, compete with it, or diminish its value. . . . His thoughts are all his own; everything has passed through the sieve of his own mind. Nothing in all the criticism of the world was ever written more profound, more just, more vigorous, or more eloquent, than that which he has given on *Paradise Lost*. Nothing so new, so acute, so exquisitely happy, as that on metaphysical poetry."—*Recollections of Foreign Travel*, vol. i. p. 146.

lightened perusal of the best models, from the end of the seventeenth century to the middle of the eighteenth. ¹

The thoughts of Johnson towards the close of his existence reverted to its opening scenes. In a letter addressed to his old schoolfellow Hector he said, "In age we feel again that love of our native place and our early friends, which in the bustle or amusements of middle life was overborne and suspended."¹ He had always retained a particular partiality for Lichfield. While he was there on a visit, in 1770, a parish rate-book was discovered a hundred years old. "Do you not think," he wrote to Mrs. Thrale, "that we study it hard? What is nearest touches us most. The passions rise higher at domestic than at imperial tragedies."² In his Dictionary, when he explains that *lich* means a corpse, and in illustration of the word quotes, "Lichfield, a field of the dead, a city in Staffordshire, so named from martyred Christians," he subjoins the proud exclamation, *Salve magna parens*. He maintained that his fellow-townsmen were the most sober and decent, the genteelest in proportion to their wealth, and spoke the purest language of any in England. Boswell doubted the superior purity of their language, for their pronunciation was strongly provincial;³ and as for their sobriety, Johnson himself remembered the time when all the better class of persons "got drunk every night, and were not the worse thought of."⁴ He asserted on another occasion, that there were no other people so orthodox in their religion,⁵ nor, we presume, so constitutional in their politics, for Boswell expressed his astonishment at discovering a Staffordshire *Whig*, a being he had not believed to exist. "Sir," answered Johnson, "there are rascals in all countries."⁶ His belief in the singular virtues of the good citizens of Lichfield was only to be surpassed by the enthusiasm of Mr. Hargrave for the

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 704.]

² [*Ibid.*, p. 214.]

³ [*Ibid.*, p. 489.]

⁴ [*Ibid.*, p. 282.]

⁵ [*Johnsoniana*, No 565.]

⁶ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 606.]

inhabitants of Liverpool, when he was appointed Recorder of the borough. "The magistrates," exclaimed that eminent lawyer, in the profusion of his gratitude, are "humane and active, the attorneys respectable, the juries intelligent, the suitors fair-minded." "But what," he was asked, "of the prisoners?" "Why, really," replied the Recorder, "for men in their situation they were as worthy a set of people as ever I met with." After his pension permitted him liberty of action, Johnson showed the sincerity of his praises by repeated excursions to his native city. He was there in the year in which he completed his *Lives of the Poets*, and was met returning from a search for a rail he had been accustomed to jump over when a lad. He related with exultation his good fortune in finding it, and the rapture with which he gazed on an object which brought back to his remembrance his juvenile sports. He ended by taking off hat, wig, and coat, and leaping over it twice.¹ Cowper, describing in his *Tirocinium* the attachment which men feel for the "play-place of their early days," says that in viewing it we almost seem to realise

Our innocent, sweet, simple years again.

His manhood had been embittered by a cruel mental disease, and he therefore looked back with unusual fondness to the only period of his existence in which he had enjoyed composure of mind. So it was with Johnson. He could not endure to remember his birthday, because "it filled him with thoughts of a life only diversified by misery, spent part in the sluggishness of penury, and part under the violence of pain, in gloomy discontent, or importunate distress."² There was no spot in the retrospect upon which his eye could repose except the early time before his dark distemper had extinguished "the sunshine of the breast." A presentiment that his business with the world was drawing to a close was probably the cause which, in the midst of his greatest literary triumph,

¹ [*Johnsoniana*, No. 676.]

² [Johnson's *Letters*, vol. i. p. 134.]

turned his attention from present scenes, and fixed it with more than ordinary force upon the happy prime when he was an obscure and light-hearted Lichfield boy. He was already ill when he paid his visit in 1781, and with slight intermissions he continued to decline till disease had terminated in death.

His domestic companions preceded him to the grave. Thrale, "to whom he bent his thoughts as to a refuge from misfortunes," and whose "eye for fifteen years had never been turned upon him but with respect or tenderness,"¹ was the first to go. He died in April, 1781, and was followed by Levett in January, 1782. Miss Williams, who had been to Johnson "for thirty years in the place of a sister,"² expired in October, 1783, and was already too ill to be social. "The black dog," he said, was the companion which shared his desolate meals.³ He used to enforce from his own experience the precept with which Burton concludes his *Anatomy of Melancholy*,—"Be not solitary; be not idle,"—and he was now suffering from the double evil. The death of his familiars had doomed him to solitude, the languor of disease had condemned him to idleness. Of visitors there was indeed no lack, but they could not fill the place of the well-tried confidants into whose hearts he had been accustomed to pour his own. The easy, constant resource of inmates who had become to him as a second self could not be supplied, and he dwelt in pathetic language upon the cheerlessness and gloom which had fallen upon his habitation at the very moment when he was confined to it by sickness and his wonted diversions were more needful than ever. His first disorder was a severe affection of the chest, which was succeeded in 1783 by a stroke of palsy. In the afternoon of the 16th of June he felt unusually easy, and began to plan schemes of life. The same night he awoke with a

¹ [*Prayers and Meditations*, p. 187.]

² [Johnson to Mrs. Porter, Nov. 10, 1783; Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 742.]

³ [To Mrs. Thrale, June 28th, 1783; *Letters*, vol. ii. p. 280.]

confused sensation in his head. He was alarmed, and prayed to God that however his body might be afflicted, his faculties might be spared. In this conjuncture he displayed that energy and presence of mind which were characteristic of him, whenever an event occurred to call them forth. To try whether his brain was affected, he turned his prayer into Latin verse. Finding his understanding perfect, but his speech gone, he drank some wine, and put himself into violent motion in the hope of stimulating the paralyzed organs into action. As all appliances proved vain, he went back to bed, and fell asleep. In the morning he wrote a note to his neighbour and landlord, Mr. Allen, and though his hand, he knew not how or why, made wrong letters, he succeeded in penning a few lines to state that, since God had deprived him of speech, and might soon deprive him of his senses, he requested his friend to come and act for him as exigencies might require.¹ The attack passed away, but the firmness and decision of Johnson in the crisis are not less worthy of note.

The respite was short. A dropsy began to develop itself, and it soon grew apparent that death was the only physician that could cure. With that spirit which animated him from boyhood he exclaimed, "I will be conquered; I will not capitulate"; but suffering is suffering, however bravely it may be borne; and with so many ills increasing upon him from within and from without, he would naturally have been desirous to go to his rest, had it not been for a horrible apprehension of death which pervaded the whole of his days—the dread, not of physical fear, to which he was a total stranger, but the dread of a humble and enlightened Christian, who knew how far what he was fell short of what he ought to be. His diaries, in which he reviews his life, are full of bitter self-reproaches. He accuses himself of neglect of religion, of waste of time, of utter uselessness to mankind. He said that the best men, always wishing to be better, and imputing every deficiency

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 734.]

to criminal negligence, could never dare to suppose the condition of forgiveness fulfilled. In his own estimation he was not among the best, nor even among the good, and he expressed with agitation the awe he felt at the prospect of having to meet his God. As the inevitable hour drew nearer it seemed increasingly terrible to him. But his heroic sense of duty rose superior to his fears. He vehemently urged everyone who approached him to take warning by his agony, and not defer their repentance. To those who were unsettled in their faith, he addressed long arguments upon the evidences of Christianity, which he made them write down. He impressed upon them the doctrine that there was no hope of salvation except through the mediation of Christ, extorted from them promises to read the Bible and to keep holy the Sabbath day. All heard him with emotion, most with tears. Many, who understood less perfectly than himself the requirements of Christianity, wondered that a man who had been pious from his youth should speak of himself with such extreme condemnation, and should be filled with alarms. The repentance which was impetuous at the outset with the agitation of fear, was fervid at the close with the animation of hope. He enquired of the physician whether he could recover, and was answered, "Not without a miracle." "Then," said Johnson, "I will take no more opiates, for I have prayed that I may render up my soul to God unclouded." Apprehension of death was succeeded by a desire to depart, and humbly believing that he had been pardoned through the merits of the Redeemer, he calmly awaited an end which he now announced to be rapidly approaching. On the 13th of December, 1784, at about seven o'clock in the evening, he pronounced the words "Jam moriturus." He then fell into a doze, and shortly afterwards, without a struggle or a groan, his great spirit fled to Him who is the source of all intellect and all life. Sir Egerton Brydges well remembered the impression made by his death upon the public, and says that

nothing like the sensation it created occurred again until the death of Byron. His remains were deposited in Westminster Abbey, and of him may be repeated with literal truth the lines which Tickell wrote on the burial of Addison:—

Ne'er to these chambers, where the mighty rest,
Since their foundation, came a nobler guest.

Among those who bore his pall was the only person in his generation who could compete with him in intellect—the wisest of politicians, the most upright of patriots, the most eloquent of orators—the illustrious Edmund Burke. Two such stars were enough of themselves to fill the firmament with glory, and it is delightful to reflect that they were warm admirers of each other, and old and intimate friends.

The appearance of Johnson is more familiar to us through the portraits of Reynolds and the descriptions of his biographers than that of any other person of past generations. He was made on a massive scale, and after early manhood grew unwieldy from corpulence. His face was scarred with the marks of scrofula, but his complexion was clear, and his features not ill-formed. "His eyes," says Mrs. Piozzi, "though of a light grey colour, were so wide, so piercing, and at times so fierce, that fear was, I believe, the first emotion in the hearts of all his beholders."¹ His general aspect was strange and uncouth, for in addition to his form being bulky and ungraceful, his head shook with a nervous tremor, his body twitched with convulsive contractions, and his legs and arms were tossed about by involuntary movements.² These peculiarities became exaggerated when his mind was at work. It was said by one of his friends that when he read his head swung seconds.³ Both in conversing and in meditation, he would sway backwards and forwards till his hands

¹ *Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 297.

² [Boswell's *Johnson*, pp. 42, 269.]

³ [*Johnsoniana*, No. 552.]



SAMUEL JOHNSON, L.L.D.

Sir Joshua Reynolds, P.R.A. 1773.

Non est in seipso, sed in rebus, in rebus, in rebus.

Non est in seipso, sed in rebus, in rebus, in rebus.

Non est in seipso, sed in rebus, in rebus, in rebus.

Non est in seipso, sed in rebus, in rebus, in rebus.

Non est in seipso, sed in rebus, in rebus, in rebus.

Non est in seipso, sed in rebus, in rebus, in rebus.

Walker & Cockerell, ph. sc.

*From the portrait painted for Topham Beauclerk
now belonging to M^r. Hallam Murray.*



almost swept the ground.¹ A lady who was dangling her foot up and down edged it purposely towards his chair, and in his beatings of the air he clutched and pulled off her shoe.² He sat down to read Grotius on a log of wood in Twickenham meadows, and seesawed so violently over his book that some people at a distance came to see what was the matter with him.³ Either unconscious of his peculiarities, or thinking them excusable because they were undesigned, he condemned in others the contortions which he practised himself. He called out to a gentleman in company, "Don't attitudinise"; he seized the hands of a second gentleman who was enforcing his argument by action, and held them down;⁴ and he made it an especial subject of praise in old Mr. Langton, the father of his friend, "that he had no grimace, no gesticulation."⁵ In walking he rolled his entire frame from side to side, and appeared to work himself forward in a zigzag direction by the motion of his body independent of his feet. His laboured gait looked, says Boswell, like the struggling efforts of a man in fetters.⁶ He constantly executed a variety of curious manœuvres. He always passed in or out of a door or passage by a certain number of steps from some particular point, and invariably made his exit and his entrance with the same foot foremost. If he failed to do this correctly, he went back to the starting-place, and began over again. Before he crossed a threshold he commonly turned round upon his heel, and often stopped in the street to whirl in these magic circles.⁷ He expresses his scorn in the Rambler for the superstitions of old women, and says he has never been charged with such weakness by either friend or foe,⁸ but his twistings and measured marchings can hardly be

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, pp. 166, 439.]

² Whyte's *Miscellanea Nova*, p. 50.

³ [*Johnsoniana*, No. 353.]

⁴ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 770.]

⁵ [*Ibid.*, p. 662.]

⁶ [*Ibid.*, p. 810.]

⁷ [*Ibid.*, pp. 165, 677; *Johnsoniana*, No. 353.]

⁸ [*The Rambler*, No. 59.]

imputed to any other cause, and it is probable that his imagination was a slave to some vague impression which his reason should have repelled.

His dress before he got his pension is said by Miss Reynolds to have been literally that of a beggar. As he was ascending the stairs, when he called on Miss Cotterel, the servant, supposing from the meanness of his appearance that he was some low person, exclaimed, "Where are you going?" and, seizing him by the shoulder, attempted to drag him back.¹ Boswell, who did not know him till he was easy in his circumstances, found him sitting in a shrivelled wig too small for his head, a brown suit of old clothes, and a pair of old shoes which he wore like slippers. His shirt was unbuttoned at the neck, his breeches at the knees, and his black worsted stockings hung loose upon his legs.² His wig was always uncombed, and the fore part burnt away by contact with the candle. At Streat-ham the butler kept in charge a smarter wig, which was exchanged for the shabby one as Johnson passed through the hall to dinner.³ His dusty suit was rarely brushed, or his under garments changed, with his own good will.⁴ In relating that one of the charges brought against Smart to prove him a lunatic was "that he did not love clean linen," he added, "and I have no passion for it."⁵ He recollected the time when it was customary to wear the same shirt for a week, and he leaned more to the old fashion than to the new. Under the guardianship of Mrs. Thrale he paid increased attention to his dress, but in his own mind he was always indifferent to it. Yet as men are not a little disgusted in their neighbours with what they tolerate in themselves, he was fastidious in his requirements when the case was not his own.⁶ "I have often

¹ [*Johnsoniana*, No. 341.]

² [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 135.]

³ [*Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 237.]

⁴ [Hawkins's *Life of Johnson*, p. 327.]

⁵ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 135.]

⁶ [*Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, pp. 286-290.]

thought," he said, "that, if I kept a seraglio, the ladies should all wear linen gowns. I would have no silk; you cannot tell when it is clean. Linen detects its own dirtiness."¹

His chambers and furniture were in keeping with the master. Dr. Burney went with him into his garret in Gough Square, and found five or six Greek folios, a deal writing-desk, and a chair and a half. The chair with three legs and one arm Johnson took to himself, and gave the other to his guest.² His manner never betrayed that he was conscious of these external deficiencies, and he apologised to no one either for the negligence of his attire or the want of common conveniences in his rooms. He often quoted with approbation the saying of the old philosopher, that he who wants least is most like the gods who want nothing.³ His slovenliness was at first the consequence of his poverty, and had become confirmed by custom. On particular points he was more nice than might have been expected from his general habits. A waiter in Scotland, when told that the lemonade was not sweet enough, took up a lump of sugar with his fingers and put it into the glass. Johnson indignantly flung the lemonade out of the window, and Sir William Scott was afraid he would have knocked down the waiter.⁴

With these notions of delicacy his mode of eating was repulsive. His huge body required a vast deal of nutriment for its sustenance, and he devoured his food in a manner which resembled the voracity of a beast of prey rather than the usual moderation of a human being. His breathing became laboured, the veins of his forehead swelled, a perspiration stood upon his face, his eyes were riveted to his plate, and his ears were closed to all which was passing. He would go contentedly for forty-eight hours without tasting a morsel, and declare that he did not suffer the least inconvenience; but whatever he did at all he did

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 337.]

² [*Ibid.*, p. 110.]

³ [*Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 275.]

⁴ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 270.]

violently, and more like a giant than an ordinary mortal.¹ He told Mrs. Thrale that "his talk was more about dishes than his thoughts."² His general bias, nevertheless, was to the side of good living. "Some people," he said, "have a foolish way of not minding what they eat; for my part, I mind my belly very carefully, for I look upon it that he who does not mind his belly will hardly mind anything." In the same spirit he would remark, after his return from a party, "It was a good dinner enough to be sure, but not a dinner to ask a man to."³ He sometimes accuses himself in his diary of too much addiction to the grosser pleasures of the table, and an observation he made to Boswell will explain the cause of the epicurism against which he struggled, but in which he certainly indulged: "Madmen are all sensual in the lower stages of the distemper; they are eager for gratifications to soothe their minds, and divert their attention from the misery which they suffer."⁴ There is hardly a trait that has been blamed in Johnson's character that cannot be traced to his mental affliction. He abstained from wine during many years of his life, for it aggravated his malady, and he could not take it in moderation.⁵ But he never cared for the flavour; it was only the result he desired. He thought claret poor stuff because a person would be drowned before it made him drunk, and he placed brandy at the head of all liquors, "because it would do soonest for a man what drinking *can* do for him."⁶ In the days when he took his bottle he preferred to be alone, that nobody might witness its effects. The largest quantities, however, of the strongest liquors, rarely did more than slightly exhilarate him.

No one could be a greater stickler for politeness than

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, pp. 159, 362, 599.]

² [Johnson's *Letters*, April 15, 1784, vol. ii. p. 362.]

³ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 160.]

⁴ [*Ibid.*, p. 553.]

⁵ [*Ibid.*, pp. 174, 336; Hawkins's *Life of Johnson*, p. 288; *Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 102.]

⁶ [Boswell's *Johnson*, pp. 680, 627.]

Johnson; he called it "fictitious benevolence," and added that the want of it never failed to produce something disagreeable.¹ He believed that he had cultivated successfully what he so strongly commended. "I look upon myself," he said, "as a very polite man."² He had indeed a delicate perception of the principles of good manners, but he had not the art of executing the outward forms, and his temper often interfered with the essence. He told Mr. Thrale he had not attempted to please till he was after thirty, from thinking it hopeless.³ When he was bent upon being courteous he overacted his part. His compliments, says Miss Hawkins, were studied, and in uttering them his head dipped lower, the semicircle in which it revolved was of greater extent, and his roar became deeper in its tone.⁴ Mr. Seward, who saw him presented to the Archbishop of York, spoke of his bow as such a studied elaboration of homage, such an extension of limb, such a flexion of body as had seldom been witnessed.⁵ He valued himself upon his ceremonious conduct to ladies, and, in the disordered dress described by Boswell, he insisted upon attending them, when they called upon him in Bolt Court, to their carriage in Fleet Street, where a mob would gather to gaze at the strange apparition.⁶ In a fit of gallantry he took the hand of Mrs. Cholmondeley at dinner, and held it so long to his eye while he admired its delicacy, that she whispered to her neighbour, "Will he give it to me again when he has done with it?"

As his politeness was too laboured and artificial, so his deviations from it were equally in an extreme. He could not brook a slight or suffer the least encroachment upon his independence, and in his poverty he assumed a defiant

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 290.]

² [*Ibid.*, pp. 391, 511; *Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 36.]

³ [*Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, pp. 25, 258.]

⁴ [*Johnsoniana*, No. 552.] ⁵ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 723.]

⁶ [Miss Reynolds, *Johnsoniana*, No. 340.]

air to preserve his dignity. The homage of inferiors contributed to foster an overbearing style, which was further aggravated by his loud voice, his stern countenance, and his wild, indignant eyes. He thought his imperiousness and dogmatism an advantage. "Obscenity and impiety," he said, "have always been repressed in my company."¹ He was easily provoked by folly or heated by argument, and then a manner which, even in his ordinary modes inclined to the harsh and dictatorial, became violent beyond the usages of civilised life. He vociferated the severest things in his noisiest tones, and only thought how to silence his antagonist. By the time he had got to the end of a period he was a good deal exhausted in his vehemence, and, in the phrase of Boswell, blew out his breath like a whale.² He was so conscious of his infirmity that once beginning, after his interview with George III., to enumerate the benefits he derived from conversing with the Sovereign, he placed first among the advantages that he could not be in a passion.³ His principles were opposed to his practice. "Sir," he said to Mr. Fitzherbert, "a man has no more right to *say* an uncivil thing, than to *act* one; no more right to say a rude thing to another, than to knock him down."⁴ He preferred a cold and monotonous to an emphatic talker,⁵ and when Burke, in proposing Mr. Vesey as a member of the Literary Club, commenced by observing that he was a man of gentle manners, Johnson stopped him: "You need say no more; when you have said a man of gentle manners you have said enough."⁶ He was always anxious after his outbreaks to make amends. He took the earliest opportunity to drink to his antagonist, or direct his discourse to him. He sometimes apologised

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 762.]

² [*Ibid.*, p. 166; Miss Reynolds, *Johnsoniana*, No. 354.]

³ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 186.] ⁴ [*Ibid.*, p. 663.]

⁵ [*Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 184.]

⁶ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 663.]

with tears in his eyes.¹ His rudeness and impetuosity were after all less frequent than might be inferred from the specimens preserved by his biographers, who naturally gave prominence to his most piquant sallies. Many people who were long acquainted with him had never heard a strong expression from him. Time exerted a mellowing influence upon his temper, and he confessed that his good humour had increased with his years. Indeed, after dwelling upon the rarity of the quality, and denying it to all the persons whom Boswell named as examples, he said, "I look upon *myself* as a good-humoured fellow."² He acknowledged that in his youth he had treated mankind with asperity and contempt, but that as he advanced in life he felt more kindness because more was shown to him.³ His violence in disputes arose from the pride of intellect which could not endure to be worsted in an argument, and was a weakness which does not admit of apology. His other outbursts of temper had often their foundation in a physical irritability, arising from the morbid state of his nerves, and were the ebullitions of suffering. Once when Boswell attempted to continue an unpalatable conversation, Johnson cried, "Give us no more of this," showed an impatience that he should leave him, and called out to him sternly as he was going away, "Don't let us meet to-morrow."⁴ Boswell's persistence in pressing unwelcome topics upon him was the thing of all others to act upon his nervous irritability, and the explosion was the impulse of nature to get rid of the torture. Goethe, after mentioning that the caustic, captious, contradictory humour which alternated with the pleasantry of Herder, originated in bodily pain, has the just reflection that "it constantly happens that the moral operation of sickness is not sufficiently considered, and many characters are wrongly

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, pp. 212, 770; *Johnsoniana*, No. 342.]

² [Boswell's *Johnson*, pp. 335, 451.]

³ [Miss Reynolds, *Johnsoniana*, No. 338.]

⁴ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 211.]

judged, because all men are supposed to be in health, and are expected to behave in a manner suitable to it."¹

Whatever might be his theoretical notions of decorum, he looked upon his breaches of it as a very venial offence. In his illness he requested Langton to tell him in what he was faulty. Langton, for reply, gave him a paper on which were written some texts commanding Christian charity. Johnson enquired in what particulars he had offended. On his friend responding "that he sometimes contradicted people harshly," he flew into a passion. "Who," he afterwards said to Boswell, "is the worse for that?" "It hurts," said Boswell, "people of weaker nerves." "I know," retorted Johnson, "no such weak-nerved people." "It is well," observed Burke, when this was repeated to him, "if, when a man comes to die, he has nothing heavier upon his conscience than having been a little rough in conversation."² Mrs. Thrale bore testimony that the roughness was confined to his words, and that all his actions were good and gentle.³ He treated lightly his verbal violence, because he judged by his own sensations, and was not aware how much pain he inflicted. When he and Goldsmith were represented in a newspaper as the pedant Holofernes and his flatterer Goodman Dull, the sensitive poet came to him foaming and vowing vengeance against the printer. "Why, who the plague," replied Johnson, "is hurt with all this nonsense? and how is a man the worse, I wonder, in his health, purse, and character, for being called Holofernes?" "I don't know," replied Goldsmith, "how you may like being called Holofernes, but I do not like to play Goodman Dull."⁴ This was the measure of the difference between his feelings and those of Boswell's weak-nerved people. What was anguish to Goldsmith was sport to Johnson. "Poh, poh," he once exclaimed, "who is the worse for being talked of uncharitably?" Criticism, as we have seen, never disturbed

¹ [Goethe's *Life of Herder*.]

² [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 756.]

³ [*Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 62.]

⁴ [*Ibid.*, p. 180.]

his quiet. He used to quote the proverb, that nobody throws stones at a tree that does not bear fruit, and he accepted censure as part of the general chorus in his praise. If, to use the metaphor which Burke applied to his style, he had the nodosities of the oak, he had also its strength.¹ Deformity though it was, his ruggedness yet partook of the gnarled grandeur of the king of the forest.

His vehemence of language has sometimes been confounded with censoriousness of disposition, from which he was wholly free. His friends considered that both intellectually and morally he was inclined to think better of his acquaintances than they deserved. He did not conceive, like some people, that charity consisted in a violation of truth, or that it was a virtue to commend a man for qualities he did not possess. One of his sayings was, that "he who praises everybody praises nobody." But no one was less disposed to imagine evil until it was proved. "He always maintained," writes Mrs. Thrale, "that the world was not half so wicked as it was represented, and he might well continue in that opinion, as he resolutely drove from him every story that could make him change it." When poor Bickerstaff fled the country, and the remark was made that he had long been a suspected man, Johnson loftily replied, "By those who look close to the ground dirt will be seen: I hope I see things from a greater distance."² His worst dislikes seldom prompted him to say more than that "the fellow was a poor creature," or "a blockhead."

A few rude speeches sink into insignificance when compared with a charity which was only bounded by his means. "He loved the poor," writes Mrs. Thrale, "as I never yet saw any one else do."³ As he said of Levett, he was "of every friendless name the friend." Besides his indoor pensioners he had a number of outdoor de-

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 673.]

² [*Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 168.]

³ [*Ibid.*, p. 84.]

pendants, and when his own funds were exhausted, he wrote innumerable letters to solicit the contributions of his acquaintances. He frequently bestowed all the silver in his pocket upon the miserable beings who waylaid him on his passage from his house to the tavern where he dined.¹ Even in his early London days he would go up at night to the destitute children who were sleeping upon the projecting stalls of shops or on the sills of doors, and slip a penny into their hands to buy them a breakfast, "and this," adds Mr. Croker, "when he himself was living on pennies."² Sixpence, he once remarked, was then a great sum to him.³ When it was objected that it was useless to give halfpence to beggars, because they only laid it out upon gin or tobacco, he energetically exclaimed, "And why should they be denied such sweeteners of existence? It is surely very savage to refuse them every possible avenue to pleasure reckoned too coarse for our own acceptance. Life is a pill which none of us can bear to swallow without gilding. Yet for the poor we delight in stripping it still barer, and are not ashamed to show even visible displeasure if ever the bitter taste is taken from their mouths."⁴ Burke held the same indignant language. "What you have just now given," a lady said to him, when he had bestowed a shilling on a beggar, "will be spent in gin." "Madam," Burke replied, with a look and tone of rebuke, "he is an old man, and if gin be his comfort let him have gin."⁵ It should hardly require the authority of the great and good to shame the unthinking or unfeeling criticism which, from the midst of plenty, denounces every physical indulgence in the poor as an extravagance or a vice. The relief afforded by Johnson to wretched outcasts was not confined to the easy charity which confers a passing dole. He one night found a woman of abandoned character lying exhausted in the

¹ [Dr. Maxwell, Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 216.]

² [*Johnsoniana*, No. 350.]

³ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 805.]

⁴ *Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 84.

⁵ Prior's *Life of Burke*, 5th ed., p. 242.

street, and lifting her up, he conveyed her on his back to his own house. There he had her nursed till she recovered her health, and then obtained her a situation.¹ A heartless man would have passed her by, a humane man might have given her money; but was there any second person in the whole of the vast population of London that would have taken up the forlorn, diseased, and dirty sufferer in his arms, and carried her to his home? There are charities which from their very lowliness become sublime. He avowedly kept only £100 of his income for his personal wants, and Mrs. Thrale calculated that he did not, in fact, spend more than £70 or £80 at most.² His kindness to dumb creatures was as conspicuous in its way as his benevolence to men. He used to go out himself to buy oysters for his cat, lest if he put the servants to the trouble, they should take a dislike to the animal, and use it ill.³

His acute sense of the real miseries of life made him intolerant of fanciful complaints. He upbraided Mrs. Thrale for wishing one summer, after a lengthened drought, for rain to lay the dust. "I cannot bear," he said, sharply, "when I know how many families will perish next winter from the scarcity of that bread which the present dryness will occasion, to hear ladies sighing for showers only that their complexions may not suffer from the heat, or their clothes from the dust."⁴ He had no sympathy for the pangs of mortified vanity, any more than for the lamentations of softness and luxury. Nor, while prompt to relieve distress, did he ever affect an exaggerated sorrow, and he blamed such false pretences in others. "You will find," he said, "these very feeling people are not very ready to do you good; they *pay* you by *feeling*."⁵ It would not have been surprising if a man who had experienced so much physical wretchedness had lost some of his sensitiveness

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 770.]

² [*Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 105.]

⁴ [*Ibid.*, p. 104.]

³ [*Ibid.*, p. 257.]

⁵ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 206.]

to the griefs of the heart. Yet few could possess a more affectionate nature, or be more deeply touched by the loss of friends, and the pathos of sentiment. "Want of tenderness," he always maintained, "was want of parts, and was no less a proof of stupidity than depravity."¹ He was thrown into an agony at the sight of an omelet shortly after the death of Dr. Nugent, because it was the dish they had had for supper the last time they met.² He cried when he read the letter which described the death of Mr. Elphinston's mother.³ Tears were a tribute he often paid. Miss Reynolds related to him some mournful story of maternal affection, and she was interrupted by his sobs.⁴ He wept as he told that Dr. Hodges, the physician who remained in London during the plague when most of his brother practitioners fled, died soon afterwards a prisoner for debt. He burst into tears in repeating the Latin hymn *Dies Iræ*,⁵ and again when he recited the description of the English from Goldsmith's Traveller. He read Beattie's Hermit with similar emotion.⁶ There is a pathos in these pieces which cannot be fully apprehended except by minds refined by literary culture. Their power proceeds from an art which is lost upon untutored perceptions, and their effect upon Johnson is at once a proof of the acuteness of his feeling for poetry and the strength of his human sensibilities.

[Of a man so tender and beneficent it might well be asserted that he had nothing of the bear except the hide. Bishop Horne compared him to a pineapple, which was the most delicious of all fruit notwithstanding that it had a prickly skin.⁷ The kindness of his nature was enhanced by its robustness. The bold front which he presented when battling with poverty and neglect was shown in all

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 217.] ² [*Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 123.]

³ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 66.] ⁴ [*Ibid.*, p. 834.]

⁵ [*Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 200.]

⁶ [Boswell's *Johnson*, pp. 384, 720.]

⁷ [Horne's *Olla Podrida*, Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 810, note.]

the other circumstances of life. He defied alike discomfort and danger, rarely complained himself, or allowed any one else to complain in his presence. If he got wet to the skin he would not change his clothes when he reached home, but would allow them to dry upon his body.¹ He would stand in the coldest days and nights before an open window ;² and when Boswell shivered, as they came up the Thames from Greenwich one bitter evening in a boat, Johnson scolded him for his effeminacy, and roared out, "Why do you shiver, sir?" Sir William Scott complained of a headache when travelling with him in a chaise. "At your age, sir," replied Johnson contemptuously, "I had no headaches."³

He was accustomed to maintain that the man who was afraid of anything was a scoundrel.⁴ "He feared death," says Boswell, "but he feared nothing else—not even what might occasion death."⁵ Though his convulsive movements would not enable him to guide a horse, and though he was so short-sighted as hardly to be able to see a yard before him, he would follow the hounds in a chase of fifty miles with desperate daring, while the sportsmen shouted to him not to ride over the dogs. He despised the occupation, and his sole motive for engaging in it was his determination to show himself as good a man as his neighbours.⁶ He laughed at the notion of caring for horses running away with a carriage. The event occurred when he was travelling in France with the Thrales, at a spot where the road was bounded by a precipice. They narrowly escaped with their lives; but he continued to ridicule the apprehensions of his companions, and exultingly exclaimed that nothing came of it "except that Thrale leaped from the vehicle into a chalk-pit, and then walked out looking as white."⁷ Having heard it asserted

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 385.]

² [*Ibid.*, p. 371.]

³ [*Ibid.*, p. 157.]

⁴ [*Johnsoniana*, No. 232.]

⁵ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 430.]

⁶ [*Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 206; Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 351.]

⁷ [*Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 276.]

that if a gun was loaded with two or three balls, there was a risk of its bursting, he put in six or seven, and fired them off against a wall. The same spirit of defiance led him, when he was bathing near Oxford, to swim straight into a pool because he was cautioned against it by Langton as particularly dangerous.¹ He protested that he was afraid of no dog in the world; and as two fierce pointers were fighting at the house of his friend Beauclerk, he cuffed their heads with his fists till they ran howling away.² He cared as little for men as for dogs. Having left for a few minutes a chair which was placed for him between the side-scenes of the theatre at Lichfield, a gentleman took the seat, and refused to resign it, upon which Johnson lifted up chair and gentleman together, and flung them both into the pit. Foote had resolved to personate him on the stage, and expected to derive large profits from the performance. Johnson purchased a stout oaken cudgel, and declared that he would break the bones of the satirist in the presence of the audience. The threat was enough for Foote, who only ventured to ridicule the unresisting. Johnson, it must be confessed, was no ordinary antagonist. A gang of four persons once attacked him at night in the street, and he kept all four at bay till the arrival of the watch.³ He united skill to muscular power, for he had learned to box from his uncle Andrew, the professional prize-fighter.⁴ If *not* to be afraid of anything is *not* to be a scoundrel, Johnson was certainly a very honest fellow.

The melancholy which saddened the whole of his days had an influence upon his habits. Miss Williams, on coming from a party where several persons had got intoxicated, exclaimed, "I wonder what pleasure men can take in making beasts of themselves?" "He, madam," replied Johnson, "who makes a *beast* of him-

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 430.]

² [*Ibid.*, p. 379; *Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 114.]

³ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 430.]

⁴ [*Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 5.]

self, gets rid of the pain of being *a man*."¹ This was more than a casual retort, for he deliberately maintained to Boswell that no one was happy in the present moment except when he was drunk.² He held that whatever felicity was enjoyed must be borrowed from hope.³ When he first entered Ranelagh it gave him a gay sensation of mind such as he had never experienced before, but it speedily went to his heart to reflect that there was not a single being in all the brilliant circle around him who was not afraid to go home and think.⁴ These notions of the universal misery of mankind were derived from the generalisation of his personal feelings. However mirthful he might seem in company, he declared it was "all outside."⁵ On his return from a splendid assemblage at Mrs. Montague's, where he appeared more pleased than usual, in consequence of the marked respect which was paid him, Dr. Maxwell asked him if he had not been gratified? "Not *gratified*!" he replied; "yet I do not recollect to have passed many evenings with *fewer objections*."⁶ The impossibility he found of "razing out the written troubles of the brain"⁷ made him catch at anything which would enable him for the moment to forget them. "The great business," he said, "of his life was to escape from himself";⁸ hence his passion for conversation and the late hours he kept. "He was afraid to go home and think." "There is one time at night," he wrote in the *Idler*, in an essay which he avowed to be his own portrait, "when he must return to his house that his friends may sleep; and another time in the morning when all the world agrees to shut out interruption." These are the moments of which poor Sober trembles at the anticipation.⁹ That he might avoid both these periods of solitude, he was neither willing to go

¹ [*Johnsoniana*, No. 550.]

² [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 447.]

³ [*Ibid.*, p. 125.]

⁴ [*Ibid.*, p. 561.]

⁵ [*Ibid.*, p. 764.]

⁶ [*Ibid.*, p. 220.]

⁷ [*Macbeth*, Act V., Sc. iii.]

⁸ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 42.]

⁹ [*The Idler*, No. 31.]

to bed, nor willing to get up again. He did not rise till twelve or one, by which hour his friends began to arrive. He sat a long while declaiming over his breakfast, went out about four to dine at a tavern, and seldom returned before two in the morning. He boasted on one occasion to Miss Williams that he was home for once before everybody was in bed, for that he had knocked against some bricklayers in the court. "You forget, my dear sir," she replied, "that they are just up, and are now beginning their morning's work."¹ To escape from moody meditation and the anguish of his own corroding thoughts, he often amused himself with practical chemistry. "He has a small furnace," he says of Sober, "which he employs in distillation, and which has long been the solace of his life. With this he draws oils and waters which he knows to be of no use."² They were of use, because the employment was medicine to his malady.³ For the same reason he loved to be driven fast in a post-chaise. "A man," he remarked, when accounting for the fascination of hunting, "feels his vacuity less in action than in rest."⁴ He consequently delighted in the mere motion of travelling, and exclaimed to Boswell as the carriage rolled rapidly along the road, "Life has not many things better than this."⁵ The animation of the movement diverted his mind from preying on itself, and he found positive pleasure in a respite from pain.

As conversation was his main refuge from uneasy thoughts, no amount of it could make him weary. He would keep it up with unflagging spirit as long as any one would sit with him — his ideas never failing, his knowledge never exhausted, his wit never running dry. He maintained that a companion who talked for fame could not be agreeable, and that the real pleasure was in a quiet interchange of sentiments without rivalry or

¹ [*Johnsoniana*, No. 317.]

³ [*Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, p. 236.]

⁵ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 485.]

² [*The Idler*, No. 31.]

⁴ [*Johnsoniana*, No. 657.]

effort.¹ Yet Burke asserted that he argued only "for victory, and that when he had neither a paradox to defend nor an antagonist to crush, he would even preface his assent with, 'Why, *no*, sir.'" ² He would commence a sentence with, "Why, sir, as to the good or evil of card-playing!" "Now," said Garrick, "he is thinking which side he shall take."³ He disliked hyperboles, and whoever praised anything extravagantly, or asserted anything confidently, was sure to be contradicted by him. His friend Dr. Taylor expatiated on the merits of a bull-dog, which he boasted was perfectly well-shaped. Johnson would not suffer even a point like this to pass. He examined the animal attentively, and having prepared himself for the contest, called out, "No, sir, he is *not* well-shaped, for there is not the quick transition from the thickness of the fore part to the slim part behind which a bull-dog ought to have."⁴ In all the countless discussions he provoked he was rarely worsted, for if arguments failed him, he won the victory by his wit. He once dreamt that he was engaged in a conflict of repartee, and was much depressed because his antagonist got the better of him. This he adduced to show that the judgment is weakened by sleep, or he would have known that the rejoinder which vexed him was as much his own as the observation it eclipsed; but the incident is equally an example of the mortification he always felt at defeat, though the annoyance and the ebullition of temper it produced were only momentary.⁵ Wit, in the estimation of his friends, was his most shining quality. "Rabelais and all the rest," said Garrick, "are nothing compared to him. You may be diverted by them, but Johnson gives you a forcible hug, and shakes laughter out of you whether you will or not."⁶ No man that we know of ever had a quiver so full of arrows. His repartee

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 578.]

² [*Ibid.*, p. 768, note.]

³ [*Ibid.*, p. 502.]

⁴ [*Ibid.*, p. 558.]

⁵ [*Ibid.*, p. 656.]

⁶ [*Ibid.*, p. 256.]

seldom lay upon the surface; it was as original and unexpected as it was sharp and telling. He had a vast abundance, in addition, of that species of illustration which equally serves to cover sophistry and to set off truth, and an acuteness of discrimination which enabled him instantly to detect the fallacies of an opponent. He envied Beauclerk the ease with which he uttered his sallies, and the freedom from the look which announced that a good thing was coming, and from the look which betrayed a consciousness that it had come.¹ But though his own elaborate manner did not please him so well, all his biographers testify that his deliberate enunciation and emphasis of tone added greatly to the force of his sayings. His delivery was as much more imposing than that of his antagonist, as his matter was more powerful; and nothing could resist the combined brilliancy of the flash, and the roar of the thunder.

Johnson, like Milton, thought,

That which before us lies in daily life
Is the prime wisdom.²

Of this "prime wisdom" there is a greater store in Boswell's work than any other book we can remember. What Johnson might not unlikely have spread out in his Rambler into a flat dissertation, he condensed in his talk into a lively and idiomatic aphorism. Sketches of character, rules of conduct, literary criticism, and questions of morals and religion, were his favourite topics. The conversation which had no bearing upon man of the passing generation he considered lost to both pleasure and instruction. He expressed a hope that he might never hear of the Punic war while he lived, and when Mr. Vesey began to talk to him about Catiline's conspiracy, "I withdrew," he said, "my attention, and thought of Tom Thumb."³ There was one quality for which he was noted, whatever the

¹ [Langton to Boswell, Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 646.]

² [*Paradise Lost*, book viii. vv. 193, 194.]

³ [*Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, pp. 80, 81.]

subject on which he spoke—the minutest regard to truth. His own scrupulosity had made him particularly sensible of the general laxity. “Nothing but experience,” he said, “could enable anyone to conceive that so many groundless reports should be propagated as every man of eminence might hear of himself.”¹ He imputed the deviations from accuracy rather to carelessness than to falsehood, and he might have added, to the disposition to supply the want of knowledge by conjecture, and from a little that is known to infer a great deal that is not. He had thus grown to be extremely incredulous, and if the narration partook at all of the marvellous, he would break in with a significant look and decisive tone, and exclaim, “It is not so; do not tell this again.” Hogarth once remarked of him, that, not contented with believing the Bible, he believed nothing but the Bible, and said, like the Psalmist, “in his haste, that all men were liars.”² He was especially mistrustful of the tales of travellers. When a friend repeated to him some extraordinary facts related by the companions of Captain Cook, Johnson replied, “I never knew before how much I was respected by these gentlemen; they told me none of these things.”³ He dined in company with Bruce, and Boswell found, on questioning him the same evening, that he gave no credence to the traveller’s testimony.⁴ In this he was not peculiar. Horace Walpole was present when Bruce was asked what description of musical instruments were used in Abyssinia. “I think,” he answered, “I saw one *lyre* there.” “Yes,” said Selwyn, in a whisper, “and there is one less since he left the country.” The rudeness of which Johnson was sometimes guilty to the narrators of wonders solely arose from the excess of his incredulity. He firmly believed that he was rebuking falsehood, and serving the cause of good morals.

¹ [Boswell’s *Johnson*, p. 572.]

² [*Anecdotes* by Mrs. Piozzi, pp. 137, 139.]

³ [Boswell’s *Johnson*, p. 496.]

⁴ [*Ibid.*, p. 441.]

{ In the same way he would violate the common forms of society to mark his horror of sceptics. / The Abbé Raynal was introduced to him and offered his hand. { Johnson drew back and refused to take it. "I will not," he said to a friend who expostulated with him, "shake hands with an infidel."¹ He would more easily pardon bad practice than bad principles. He had a strong feeling against schismatics, and never grew more hot than when the discussion turned upon the points at issue between them and the Church. As he walked at Oxford, in New Inn Hall garden, Sir Robert Chambers picked up snails and threw them over the wall into the adjoining premises. Johnson roughly rebuked him for so unneighbourly an act. "My neighbour," pleaded Sir Robert, "is a dissenter." "If so," rejoined Johnson, "toss away, toss away as hard as you can."² This was more than half a jest, for it was a common habit with him to indulge in humorous exaggeration; but a slight incident, recorded by him in one of the pious entries in his diary, is a serious and significant indication of his sentiments. "Seeing a poor girl at the Sacrament in a bedgown I gave her privately a crown, *though* I saw Hart's hymns in her hand."³ Hart was a Presbyterian, and notwithstanding that the girl was attending the Communion in the Church of England, it is plain from Johnson's "though" that he thought the mere fact of her reading Presbyterian hymns, which she probably valued for their piety, without the least knowledge of the ecclesiastical principles of their author, was a reason against the extension of his bounty to her. All distinctions were forgotten by him at the spectacle of distress, and that her possession of this book should have passed through his mind as a motive for checking his benevolence is a curious evidence of the strength of his convictions. His distaste, however, for their opinions

¹ [*Memoirs of Hannah More*, vol. i. p. 394.]

² [Nichols's *Illustrations of Literature*.]

³ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 165.]

did not prevent his partiality for individuals. He had friends among men of all parties, both political and religious.

He was as stout and energetic in his creed respecting the State as in matters which affected the Church. He was a Tory opposed to constitutional changes and the licence of the mob. But those who have represented him as a bigot to abuses have not read his works. In many respects he was in advance of his age, or at least must be ranked among the foremost men in it. Years before Wilberforce had opened his lips against the slave trade or slavery, Johnson in a company of "potent, grave, and reverend signiors" at Oxford gave for a toast, "To the next insurrection of the negroes in the West Indies." Boswell, who shared the common opinions of the time, boldly avers that "he showed more zeal than knowledge" on the subject, and that to adopt his notions would "be robbery of the planters," "cruelty to the African savages," and in a word would be

To shut the gates of mercy on mankind.¹

As early, again, as 1751 Johnson published a paper in the *Rambler*, in which he urged with unanswerable arguments a mitigation of our bloody criminal code, and showed that humanity and policy alike demanded the change.² A little later, in the *Idler*, he demonstrated the cruelty of allowing creditors, blinded by interest and inflamed by resentment, to imprison at their private pleasure debtors guiltless of fraud, and whose only crime was misfortune.³ His own poverty and the arrests to which he had been subjected, together with the inhumanity he must have seen practised towards his obscure associates, had put him in a position to know and feel the injustice of the system. But in no shape did oppression find a friend in him, and he was not more zealous for order and authority

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, pp. 562, 563.]

² [*The Rambler*, No. 114.]

³ [*The Idler*, No. 22.]

than he was hostile to the ills which laws had caused and laws could cure.

| The history of Johnson teaches a lesson of resignation to those who are straitened in their circumstances, when a man so good and gifted languished for considerably more than half his life in abject penury ; a lesson of perseverance to those who are desponding, when a toilsome and desolate road, which it took more than thirty years to traverse, and which seemed to have no other goal than the grave, led him at last to competence and ease ; a lesson of contentment to those who do not possess his mental pre-eminence, when Providence had coupled with it a disorder which saddened his days, and conjoined with the brightness of the flame the smart of the burn ; a lesson of intellectual humility to those who are his inferiors in mind and knowledge, when he always spoke of his own attainments as slight, and a lesson of moral humility to those who are not possessed of his worth, when, in spite of his exemplary conduct and marvellous benevolence, he was almost enraged if anybody spoke of him as good ; a lesson of the supreme importance of religion to those whose piety is less fervent than his, when his repentance was so bitter at the close, and present fame and future renown were quite forgotten in the contemplation of eternity ; a lesson to all of what can be effected in situations which appear to afford no scope for the exertion of abilities or the practice of virtues, when we see the learning he amassed in his youth with scanty aid from books or instructors, the works he wrote without ease or encouragement, the charities he exercised without gold or silver, when he was living himself upon fourpence halfpenny a day, and the honesty and independence he maintained when not to lower his opinions or sully his conscience was to condemn himself to fare as coarse as that which was allotted for the punishment of crime. Whether we desire an example to stimulate us to the acquisition of knowledge under difficulties, or the

retention of uprightness under temptation, there is no more memorable instance of either than is presented by the life and character of this illustrious man. And whatever be the condition of him who seeks to profit by the story, none can be so low but he is in a position as advantageous as Johnson, and none can be so high but that, with all his helps, he will have enough to do to emulate his model. |



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GRAY

THIS Essay was published in the Quarterly Review for December, 1853, under the title of "The Life and Works of Gray." It was afterwards interleaved for revision, but never was touched. It is therefore reprinted here as it stood in the Review, except for the omission of some preliminary passages on the liberties which Mason took with Gray's letters when he edited them for publication.

The references added in the notes are to the editions of Gray which the author used in preparing the article. These were Gray's *Works*, with Life by Mitford, 1836-1843; the Eton edition of Gray's *Poetical Works*, with Mitford's later Memoir, 1853; and Mitford's *Correspondence of Gray and Mason*, 1853, with the *Additional Notes*, 1855.

GRAY

THOMAS GRAY, the fifth child of Philip Gray, a money-scrivener, was born December 26, 1716, in Cornhill, where his mother and her sister kept a milliner's shop. Of twelve children, eleven died in their infancy from fulness of blood, and the poet would have shared the family fate but for the firmness of his mother in opening a vein. A case submitted to counsel, on the part of Mrs. Gray, in 1735, when her son was an undergraduate at Cambridge, admits us to a view of the domestic interior.¹ The money-scrivener was jealous of every man who approached his wife, her brother included, and in his paroxysms of suspicion he beat and kicked her, accompanying his blows with the most abusive language. This usage, which commenced shortly after the marriage, had grown to such a height, that for a twelvemonth past Mrs. Gray, out of fear for her life, had shared her sister's bed. Her husband threatened to take further revenge. He was the owner of the house in which they all lived, and in which the millinery trade was carried on. He gave warning to Mary Antrobus, the sister, to quit, in the hope, real or pretended, that the business would be destroyed by removing it from its ancient locality. Mrs. Gray's share of the profits had been settled upon herself at the time of the marriage, and besides paying forty pounds a year to her husband for the rent of the shop, and providing most of the furniture of his house, she had

¹ [Mitford's *Life of Gray*, App. B, *Works*, vol. i. p. xcvi.]
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been at nearly the whole of the expense of keeping Thomas at Eton, and was now his sole support at the University. All her maternal hopes were therefore bound up with the profits of her trade, and, lest her own bankruptcy should prove insufficient, the money-scrivener declared he would also "ruin himself to undo his wife and his son." "He is really so very vile in his nature," the case concludes, "that she hath all the reason to expect the most troublesome usage from him that can be thought of."

Under these circumstances Mrs. Gray desired the opinion of Dr. Audley, a civilian, whether her husband could molest her if she followed her sister to another shop. The answer was not encouraging. She was told that Mr. Gray might compel her to return, unless she could prove that it was unsafe to live with him; that sentences of separation on the ground of cruelty were rarely obtained; and that the most prudent course was to attempt a reconciliation through a common friend. It does not appear that the scrivener ever executed his threat of ejecting the sister and her stock-in-trade; and, in all probability, the business and the quarrelling both went on in their usual course. The poet repaid his mother's sacrifices on his behalf with a warmth of affection which is the most pleasing trait recorded of him. He seldom mentioned her after she was dead without a sigh.

Nothing is known of the childhood of Gray. The first we hear of him is that he was sent to Eton, where two of his maternal uncles were ushers; and the one who had charge of him "took," says Horace Walpole, "prodigious pains with him, which answered exceedingly."¹ He was then an elegant boy of thirteen, with fine hair and a good complexion, and showed to advantage among the rougher-looking youths around him. For a lad he was reputed a fair scholar, but never attracted any especial notice. He used to read Virgil in play-hours for his own amuse-

¹ [*Correspondence of Gray and Mason*, p. xxxi.]

ment, and this he considered the earliest symptom that his temperament was poetical. A particular part of his uncle's instruction was to initiate him into "the virtues of simples,"¹ which did him no service, for, like most valetudinarians, he was fond of doctoring himself, and simples have their evils as well as their virtues. His chief intimates at school were Horace Walpole, and a more kindred spirit, West, whose early promise has been immortalised by his connexion with his friend. Walpole often asserted that "Gray never was a boy," by which he meant that he had a precocious maturity of mind; but the description was true in a second sense, and they both kept aloof from the games of their associates. They were rather despised for their effeminacy, which was shown in the extreme fastidiousness of their habits as well as in their aversion to athletic sports.² Gray was never on horseback in his life. There were so many repugnant points of character between him and Walpole, that we suspect they were chiefly drawn together at Eton by their common distaste for the sports of their companions.

The little which can be gleaned of the schoolboy days of Gray is not related by Mason, who had ample opportunities of learning his disposition and pursuits, and he kept back from the public all the juvenile letters, though many of them, according to Walpole, were characterised by "infinite humour and wit." Not one of them has since turned up. Mason was even unwilling that Walpole should preserve the correspondence in his cabinet unless he erased the openings and conclusions, which the biographer thought derogatory to the dignity of his hero because they were boyish, as if he was ashamed to have

¹ [*Correspondence of Gray and Mason*, p. xxxi.]

² These particulars are related by Jacob Bryant [*Poetical Works*, pp. lx.-lxvi.], who was in the same form at Eton with Gray and Walpole. Walpole, who said of himself in after life that he was pushed up at school beyond his parts, was nine or ten places higher than Gray, though nearly a year younger. All that Jacob Bryant has told of the poet which did not fall directly under his own observation is one continuous blunder.

it known to the world that Gray was not always a man. "Is it not odd," wrote the poet to his friend West, "to consider one's contemporaries in the grave light of husband and father? There is my Lords [Sandwich] and [Halifax]; they are statesmen: Do not you remember them dirty boys playing at cricket?"¹ Horace Walpole, on revisiting Eton, expressed the same natural sentiment in his scoffing vein: "If I don't compose myself a little more before Sunday morning, when Ashton is to preach, I shall certainly be in a bill for laughing at church; but how to help it, to see him in the pulpit, when the last time I saw him here he was standing up funking over against a conduct² to be catechised."³ Everybody has felt the force of such associations, and Mason had a notion that they operated in biography as in actual life, whereas the process is reversed, and the greatness of the man gives consequence and interest to the qualities of the boy.

The uncle who superintended Gray's education at Eton was a fellow of Peterhouse, Cambridge, and there his nephew entered as a pensioner in 1734. The studies of the place were mathematics, the recreation was drinking, and he had no taste for either. Classical learning, which had been everything at Eton, he found was held in disdain; and, after submitting with aversion to a formal attendance on the usual routine of lectures, he came to

¹ [May 27, 1742, *Works*, vol. ii. p. 165.]

² [In the article in the Quarterly Review this word appeared as "conduit." Dr. Hawtrey, the Provost of Eton, wrote to Mr. Murray, January 22, 1854, to call his attention to the blunder "which has been carried through two editions of Walpole's *Letters*, and has been preserved in repeated quotations by various writers on Walpole. The curates of Eton College are called *conducts*, and in Walpole's time, and for many years after that time, the fellows, whose office it was to catechise the King's scholars in Lent, relieved themselves of that duty, and transferred it to the conducts. It seems odd that no one should yet have been startled with the idea of a lecture on the Catechism being administered by a waterpipe." The correction was inserted in a "Note" in the next number of the Review.]

³ [To George Montagu; Walpole's *Letters*, ed. Cunningham, vol. i. p. 15.]

the determination not to take a degree. "It is very possible," he said, "that two and two make four, but I would not give four farthings to demonstrate this ever so clearly; and if these be the profits of life, give me the amusements of it. The people I behold all around me, it seems, know all this and more, and yet I do not know one of them who inspires me with any ambition of being like him."¹ Contempt of knowledge is always based upon ignorance. In his riper manhood he regretted his want of mathematical science, and declared his intention of cultivating it.² Walpole, who removed from Eton to Cambridge at the same time with his friend, had, with as little inclination and less talent for mathematics, a greater eagerness for distinction. He became a pupil of Sanderson, the well-known blind professor, who said to him before a fortnight was past,—“Young man, it is cheating you to take your money; believe me, you never can learn these things; you have no capacity for them.”³ Walpole cried with vexation, but with the confidence of youth, which believes no teacher except experience, he thought that Sanderson was mistaken. He engaged another tutor, and diligently received his lessons for a year, when he abandoned the struggle. What he learnt one day was so entirely obliterated the next that it had all the appearance of a new proposition. Gray could have comforted him then with the honest assurance that the grapes were sour.

Deprived of the stimulus of emulation, and kept in inaction by the contrariety between his private inclinations and the pursuits of the University, the early part of Gray's residence at Cambridge was a cheerless period, for the gloomy disposition he inherited from his father infected even his youth, and he had no resources out

¹ [To West, *Works*, vol. ii. p. 8.]

² [*Ibid.*, from Mathias's *Observations on Gray's Writings*, p. 68; Nicholls's *Reminiscences of Gray*, *Works*, vol. v. p. 47.]

³ [Walpole's *Letters*, vol. ix. p. 467.]

of his books. "Almost all the employment of my hours," he wrote to West, "may be explained by negatives. Take my word and experience upon it, doing nothing is a most amusing business, and yet neither something nor nothing gives me any pleasure."¹ "Low spirits," he says a little later, to the same correspondent, "are my true and faithful companions; they get up with me, go to bed with me, make journeys and return as I do; nay, and pay visits, and will even affect to be jocose, and force a feeble laugh with me; but most commonly we sit alone together, and are the prettiest insipid company in the world."² Society afforded him no alleviation. He professed himself quite unequal to it, and was so incapable of sympathising with its ordinary pleasures, that kindness, he told Walpole, was almost the only idea he had ever received of social happiness.³ Yet he called his depression an easy state, which had no other fault than its *ennui*. "But," he added, "there is another sort, which I have now and then felt, that has somewhat in it like Tertullian's rule of faith, *Credo quia impossibile est*; for it believes, nay, is sure of everything that is unlikely, so it be but frightful; and, on the other hand, excludes and shuts its eyes to the most possible hopes, and everything that is pleasurable; from this the Lord deliver us! for none but he and sunshiny weather can do it."⁴ The sun was always his great physician, and without it he said life would often have been intolerable to him.⁵ There is an uncomplaining and passive hopelessness of tone in these and many similar passages which is peculiarly touching. He was already aware that "Melancholy had marked him for her own"—that the malady was inherent in his constitution, beyond the power of medicine to cure or of his will to subdue it.

Notwithstanding Gray's playful assertion that doing nothing was a most amusing business, it was his favourite

¹ [*Works*, vol. ii. p. 3.]

² [*Ibid.*, p. 19.]

³ [*Ibid.*, p. 13.]

⁴ [To West, May 27, 1742, *Ibid.*, p. 165.]

⁵ [*Ibid.*, p. 146.]

maxim through life that to be employed was to be happy. He lamented his frequent inability to apply the specific ; and study, at best, relieved his melancholy without removing it. No sooner, however, was he released from attendance on tutors than he informed his friend West that he was learning Italian "like any dragon."¹ He had previously made some progress in French, and both these languages were now to come into use. He quitted Cambridge in September, 1738, and resided in London with his father and mother till March, 1739, when Horace Walpole invited him to be his companion in a continental tour. The excitement of new manners, scenes, and people appears for a while to have had an inspiring effect upon Gray, and made him allow that, though "a reasonable, we were by no means a pleasurable people," and should be improved by an admixture of French and Italian vivacity. At the beginning of May, 1741, the travellers were at Reggio, where they had a violent quarrel, and the indignant poet returned to England by himself. The elements of discord had been sullenly at work from the commencement. Walpole travelled for amusement, Gray for instruction ; Walpole cared chiefly for balls and parties, Gray for the beauties of nature and art ; Walpole assumed the airs of a patron, and Gray was as proud as if the blood of all the Howards had flowed in his veins. Walpole confesses that he treated Gray insolently, and reproached him with the difference of station, and Gray, on the other hand, reproved Walpole for his failings without reserve. Thus much Walpole related to Mason after the death of the poet ; but, copious as he was upon the preliminary disagreements, he studiously evaded all explanation of the final outbreak at Reggio, beyond acknowledging that the fault was entirely his own.² Whatever was the cause, it was clearly something that Walpole was ashamed to tell. The conduct of Gray confirms the impression that the

¹ [March, 1737, Gray's *Works*, vol. ii. p. 33, note.]

² [*Ibid.*, vol. iv. pp. 216-19 ; Walpole's *Letters*, vol. v. p. 441.]

offence went much beyond a sally of temper. Four years after the separation Walpole wrote to him and proposed a reconciliation. He responded to the call, but Cole, who was afterwards on cordial terms with both of them, states that at the interview, which took place in November, 1745, Gray emphatically declared that, while he was willing that civility should be restored, it must be understood that their friendship was totally cancelled.¹ To another intimate, Mr. Robinson,² the poet let drop expressions which implied that the injury was too deep to be eradicated. A letter which he addressed to Mr. Wharton immediately after the meeting affords further proof that he received the advances with coldness. "I went to see the *party* (as Mrs. Foible says), and was something abashed at his confidence: he came to meet me, kissed me on both sides with all the ease of one who receives an acquaintance just come out of the country, squatted me into a fauteuil, began to talk of the town, and this and that and t'other, and continued, with little interruption, for three hours, when I took my leave very indifferently pleased, but treated with monstrous good breeding." Two days afterwards they breakfasted together, "when," says the poet, "we had all the *éclaircissement* I ever expected, and I left him far better satisfied than I have been hitherto."³ Walpole continued to court him with assiduity, and won back part of his good-will, if not of his esteem; but twelve years after the reconciliation Gray was still so punctilious, that it annoyed him to allow, what he could find no civil pretext to refuse—the

¹ [*Works*, vol. i. p. xi.]

² The Rev. William Robinson was a brother of the celebrated Mrs. Montague. Gray made his acquaintance at Cambridge, and twice visited him at his residence, Denton Court, near Canterbury. The familiar terms on which they lived may be gathered from a letter addressed to Mr. Robinson by the poet, and which commences "Dear (Reverend) Billy." Mr. Robinson considered Mason unequal to the task of writing Gray's Life, and refused his countenance and assistance—a slight which the biographer never forgave. When the work appeared, Mr. Robinson remarked that it was better than he had expected.

³ [*Works*, vol. ii. pp. 173, 174.]

printing of two of his Odes at the Strawberry Hill Press—and he was careful to inform his friends that the work was done for Dodsley, to whom he had disposed of the manuscript, and not for himself. Isaac Reed was told by Mr. Roberts, of the Pell Office, a gentleman likely, he truly says, to be well informed, that the offence of Walpole which produced such durable effects was that he clandestinely opened a letter of Gray, from a suspicion that his companion spoke ill of him in his correspondence.¹ The authority is respectable, and the explanation consistent with all we know of the circumstances—with Walpole's confession that the blame was exclusively his, with his silence upon the cause of the actual quarrel, with the deep resentment of Gray, and his refusal to return to cordiality and confidence.

Gray arrived in London from his travels, September 1st, 1741, and the 6th of November his father died of gout in the stomach, at the age of sixty-five. Brutal to his wife, he was reserved and morose to the rest of the world, and none of his connexions had much cause to regret him. Before his decease he had nearly, without intending it, accomplished his threat of ruining himself, for his business languished from inattention, and, unknown to his family, he squandered large sums in his later years on a country house at Wanstead, which fetched two thousand pounds less than the scrivener had spent in building it. At the time of going abroad Gray was about to enter the Temple, and prepare himself for the practice of the Common Law. He now abandoned the design, on the plea that his inheritance was too small to support him through the long apprenticeship. When West, a year before, announced to him that he had turned his back upon the Temple in disgust, Gray wrote him an admirable letter of remonstrance. He reminded him that it was a duty to be serviceable to mankind; that public exertions were the proper employment of youth, and

¹ [Gray's *Works*, vol. ii. p. 174, note.]

private pursuits the enjoyment of age; that, though the labour of mastering the law was long, and the elements unentertaining, there was, on a further acquaintance, plenty of matter in it for curiosity and reflection; that our inclinations are more than we suppose in our own power; that reason and resolution determine them; and that he must not mistake mere indolence for inability. "I am sensible," he continued, "there is nothing stronger against what I would persuade you to than my own practice; which may make you imagine I think not as I speak. Alas! it is not so; but I do not act what I think, and I had rather be the object of your pity than you should be that of mine."¹ As Gray continued to live for years with no addition to his patrimony, and without earning or attempting to earn a single penny, he could almost as easily have afforded to be a student of law as a student of Greek. The want of money was only the excuse, —the real cause was what his letter intimates, the want of inclination. His shy and sensitive nature shrank from the contests of active life; and, if the study of the law was distasteful to him, the practice would have been insupportable.

The same winter that he lost his father, Gray commenced the composition of a tragedy. Hitherto, except a few translations, all his attempts at poetry had been confined to the Latin tongue. His hexameters were formed, and not unsuccessfully, upon the model of Virgil, but he was less acquainted with the lyric measures, and has several lines which are faulty in their metre. In hexameters and lyrics alike he has allowed a few false quantities to escape him, and his Latinity is not always pure. A command of poetical language appears to us the chief merits of these fruits of his Eton education, for there is throughout a want of substance in the ideas. Yet even after he had written some of his finest vernacular pieces he prided himself most upon his Roman exercises,

¹ [*Works*, vol. ii. pp. 122-5.]

—a weakness which he was accustomed to ridicule in Petrarch. Those who compose in a learned language are apt to estimate the value of their numbers by the glow of satisfaction they feel in the happy adaptation of a classical phrase.

In English Gray was ignorant at first where his strength lay. His genius was not dramatic; and he afterwards said of his fragment of Agrippina that the heroine “talked like an old boy, all in figures and mere poetry, instead of nature and the language of real passion.”¹ Nothing, certainly, can be more artificial. West, to whom the specimen was sent, treated it coldly, and “put a stop,” said Gray, “to that tragic torrent he saw breaking in upon him.” He objected to the length of Agrippina’s speech, and more particularly to the style, which he thought antiquated, and copied too closely from Shakespeare. Gray acknowledged and defended the imitation, but allowed that he might have carried it further than was proper.² None of his subsequent commentators have been able to detect the resemblance, and we must confess ourselves in the same predicament. Whatever there may be of Shakespeare’s manner, there is, at least, little of his inspiration, and even as poetry Agrippina excites no emotion. Now it comes recommended by the name of Gray it is easy to detect casual traces of his hand, but it is almost destitute of the merits, essential in a tragedy, which he ascribes to Dryden, and has neither the thoughts that breathe nor the words that burn. The metrical qualities of his blank verse would hardly entitle him to a secondary rank among the cultivators of that most difficult of measures.

Mrs. Gray and her sister, having acquired a moderate independence by their trade, gave up the shop in Cornhill, on the death of the scrivener, and retired to Stoke, near Windsor, where they lived with a third sister, Mrs. Rogers,

¹ [To Walpole, January, 1747, *Works*, vol. iii. p. 29.]

² [*Works*, vol. ii. pp. 148-54.]

whose husband had likewise recently died. He had formerly been an attorney, but had long left business to enjoy the pleasures of the chase. Gray visited him at Burnham, in Buckinghamshire, in 1737, when he was confined to the house with the gout. Dogs occupied all the chairs; and the crippled enthusiast, unable to take the field, "regaled himself with the noise and stink" of his hounds. His nephew he held excessively cheap for preferring walking to riding, and reading to hunting;¹ and if the old sportsman had survived till the days of the "Bard" and the "Progress of Poetry," they would probably have done as little to raise their author in his esteem as similar compositions to recommend Tom Jones to the favour of Squire Western.

In May, 1742, Gray joined his relations at Stoke, and there, in the beginning of June, he composed the first of his immortal pieces,—the Ode on the Spring. The descriptions from nature, slight, but picturesque in the extreme, and the pensive moralisings which accompany them, are equally from the life. A comparison of the second stanza with the account he gives in a letter of his occupation at Burnham five years before, shows how closely the verse corresponded with the reality.

Where'er the oak's thick branches stretch
 A broader browner shade,
 Where'er the rude and moss-grown beech
 O'er-canopies the glade,
 Beside some water's rushy brink
 With me the Muse shall sit, and think
 (At ease reclin'd in rustic state),
 How vain the ardour of the crowd,
 How low, how little are the proud,
 How indigent the great!

"Both vale and hill are covered with most venerable beeches and other very reverend vegetables, that, like most other ancient people, are always dreaming out their

¹ [Gray to Walpole, *Works*, vol. ii. p. 20.]

old stories to the winds. At the foot of one of these squats me I (*il penseroso*), and there grow to the trunk for a whole morning. The timorous hare and sportive squirrel gambol around me like Adam in Paradise before he had an Eve; but I think he did not use to read Virgil, as I commonly do there."¹

The scene is repeated in the Elegy—

There at the foot of yonder nodding beech,
That wreathes its old fantastic roots so high,
His listless length at noontide would he stretch,
And pore upon the brook that babbles by.

It seems from the same authority that he was an early riser, and was accustomed to walk abroad at "peep of dawn." Passages like these belong as much to the biography as to the works of the poet.

Gray was accustomed to communicate all his compositions to West. He sent him the Ode on the Spring, but when it arrived his friend was dead. The last letter he received from West was one rallying him for having said that he conversed only with the illustrious departed, and almost longed to be with them.² From the tone of the remonstrance it is evident that the writer was quite unconscious that his own sandglass had nearly run out. He expired three weeks afterwards of a consumption, which was supposed to have been induced, and was certainly aggravated, by the detection of an intrigue between a mother on whom he doted, and a pretended friend of his family. Gray, tender and devoted in his attachments, not only made these sorrows his own, but to the end of his life, whenever the name of West was mentioned, his countenance changed, and he looked as if he was suffering from a recent loss.

The visit to Stoke was propitious to the sparing muse of Gray. In August he composed the Ode "On a Distant Prospect of Eton College," and the "Hymn to Adversity";

¹ [Gray to Walpole, *Works*, vol. ii. p. 21.]

² [May 11, 1742, *Works*, vol. ii. p. 164.]

and Mason ascribes the greater part of the "Elegy written in a Country Churchyard" to the same period. In five months he had produced full half of what is excellent in his poetical works. He was now in his twenty-sixth year, and he had twenty-nine years more of life before him. Well might he regret when his days were drawing to a close that he had done so little for literature.

His relatives at Stoke being urgent with him to fulfil his original intention of pursuing the law, he made a show of adopting the civil branch of the profession, and went to Cambridge in the winter of 1742, and took his degree as Bachelor of Civil Laws. Henceforward he made the University his home. Disliking the people, he was unable to resist the advantages presented by a collegiate establishment,—the access to books, the freedom from every species of housekeeping trouble, the entire command over his time, and the power to be solitary in the midst of the spectacle and luxuries of life. Gradually he formed a narrow circle of acquaintances after his own heart, and his satisfaction in the place was not diminished because, while enjoying the society of the selected few, he could indulge in satire on the herd of gownsmen. The usual strain of his ridicule, ~~which~~ was chiefly directed against their want of literature, may be judged from the account he gives of the reception at Cambridge of Walpole's *Historic Doubts*: "Certain it is that you are universally read here; but what *we* think is not so easy to come at. We stay as usual to see the success, to learn the judgment of the town, to be directed in our opinions by those of more competent judges. If they like you, we shall; if any one of name write against you, we give you up; for we are modest and diffident of ourselves, and not without reason. History, in particular, is not our *forte*; for, the truth is, we read only modern books and pamphlets of the day."¹

There is no appearance of bitterness in this sarcastic

¹ [To Walpole, Feb. 14, 1768, *Works*, vol. iv. p. 105.]

pleasantry, but it is not on that account less keen and contemptuous. The grave and reverend seniors of the University were well acquainted with his scorn, and never regarded him with much esteem. It was otherwise with the juniors, after his fame was established, and when he chanced to issue forth from his college, which he rarely did latterly, they rushed into the street to catch a sight of him, and took off their caps to him as he passed.

With his degree he bid farewell for ever to the study of the law, and in his future pursuits was guided solely by his inclinations. He was fresh from the composition of some of the most delicious poetry in the language, he could not possibly be a stranger to the magic of his numbers, and, as he kept them close in his desk, his ardour had not been chilled by the indifference of the world. Yet, strange to say, with the exception of a brief satirical fragment, entitled a "Hymn to Ignorance," he allowed the next four years to pass without attempting a line. The cause of this was not his indifference to authorship, for he confessed that he always "liked himself better" after a fit of versifying.¹ As little did it proceed from poverty of ideas, but was chiefly occasioned by the effort which it cost him to exert his mind in poetical composition. A glance at his poems is sufficient to show that they are not of the kind which are struck off at a heat, and he never cared to conceal that they were elaborated with even greater toil than they betray. When he was asked by Mr. Nicholls why he did not finish the fragment on the Alliance of Education and Government, he answered, "Because he could not," adding that he had accustomed himself, till he could write no otherwise, to a minuteness of finish, the labour of which in a lengthy poem would be quite intolerable.² This labour was rendered doubly arduous by his sickly constitution, which brought with it lassitude as well as melancholy.

¹ [Feb. 25, 1768, *Works*, vol. iv. p. 111.]

² [Nicholls's *Reminiscences of Gray*, *Works*, vol. v. p. 35.]

"I by no means," he wrote to Dr. Wharton, in 1758, "pretend to inspiration, but yet I affirm that the faculty in question is by no means voluntary. It is the result, I suppose, of a certain disposition of mind, which does not depend on one's self, and which I have not felt this long time. You that are a witness how seldom this spirit has moved me in my life may easily give credit to what I say."¹ | At a period which for him was peculiarly prolific he remarked that the bardic impulse did not at best stir within him above three times a year, and it seldom lasted long enough to enable him to complete what he began. | Dejection of mind, on the contrary, put in motion the readier pen of Cowper, and afforded him just the diversion he required. When his spirits were unequal to one of those charming letters, which few persons penned with greater ease, he could still amuse himself with "the pleasure of poetic pains."² What writing was to Cowper reading was to Gray,—occupation without fatigue. | He therefore hung up his harp and took down Plato and Aristotle. |

| In six years he had nearly gone through the whole range of Greek authors, making a digest of their contents, and grammatical remarks upon the text, in addition to which he compiled a Chronological Table in nine columns, which was the wonder of the indefatigable students around him. | In 1747 he thus reports progress: "I have read Pausanias and Athenæus all through, and Æschylus again. I am now in Pindar and Lysias: for I take verse and prose together like bread and cheese."³ He gave much attention to Strabo and geography. Thucydides he thought the model of history, and the Retreat before Syracuse among the choicest pieces of writing in the world. Of Aristotle he said that he was the hardest author he ever meddled with; that he had

¹ [*Works*, vol. iii. p. 192.]

² [To Mason, July 25, 1756, *Ibid.*, p. 152.]

³ [To Wharton, *Ibid.*, p. 44.]

a dry conciseness, which rather resembled a table of contents than a book, and, to crown all, an abundance of fine, uncommon things, which were worth the trouble it cost to get at them.¹ He had the highest admiration of Socrates, and ranked the *Memorabilia* of Xenophon among the most valuable works on morality. But his favourite author was Plato. "What he admired in him," he said, in conversation, "was not his mystic doctrines, which he did not pretend to understand, nor his sophistry, but his excellent sense, sublime morality, elegant style, and the perfect dramatic propriety of his dialogues."² The criticisms of Gray, like his prose descriptions of scenery, are pre-eminently distinguished for their conciseness, their simplicity, and the faculty of discriminating among the mass of particulars what was truly characteristic.

On Mr. Nicholls expressing astonishment at the extent of his learning, he replied that he had found from experience how much might be done by a person who read with method, and did not fling away his time on middling or inferior authors.³ This is the great secret of studying to advantage, and, besides that more is thus learnt and retained, the mind, by constant contact with master spirits, is often elevated to their level, and is always raised above what was formerly its own. Gray justly prognosticated that one evil of the Dictionaries, and other royal roads to knowledge, which began to multiply in his day, would be the temptation they held out to depend on their compendious but superficial information, instead of studying subjects through in the original authorities.⁴ The old proverb is true of Encyclopædias—that they are good servants but bad masters. Thus far Gray was an admirable example for future scholars, but here again we have cause to regret that the vast preparation resulted in

¹ [To Wharton, *Works*, vol. iii. p. 12.]

² [Nicholls's *Reminiscences*, *Ibid.*, vol. v. pp. 41-3.

³ [*Ibid.*, p. 42.]

⁴ [*Ibid.*, p. 51.]

nothing. It is melancholy that he should have to write to Mason, in 1757, "The days and the nights pass, and I am never the nearer to anything but that one to which we are all tending. Yet I love people that leave some traces of their journey behind them, and have strength enough to advise you to do so while you can."¹ It must constantly have deepened his gloom to look back upon the blank which his life presented, to reflect upon his wasted powers,—

And that one talent which is death to hide,
Lodged with him useless.

"To find oneself business," he wrote, in 1760, "is, I am persuaded, the great art of life; and I am never so angry as when I hear my acquaintance wishing they had been bred to some poking profession, or employed in some office of drudgery, as if it were pleasanter to be at the command of other people than at one's own; and as if they could not go unless they were wound up; yet I know and feel what they mean by this complaint; it proves that some spirit, something of genius more than common, is required to teach a man how to employ himself."² It is a lesson he never sufficiently learnt, and he would have been happier, if to the task of amusing himself he had conjoined some occupation which could have been of use to the world.

The reconciliation with Walpole in 1745 produced a renewal of their correspondence, and the first letter of the series which has been preserved is a good specimen of the poet's epistolary style. It was written from Cambridge at the beginning of February, 1746, shortly after the Pretender had defeated General Hawley at Falkirk, and gives a curious picture of the apathy which prevailed on the occasion,—produced not so much by a lingering feeling in favour of the Stuarts, as by the want of almost every

¹ [Dec. 19, 1757, *Works*, vol. iii. p. 184.]

² [To Wharton, April 22, 1760, *Ibid.*, p. 236.]

popular quality in the two first sovereigns of the Brunswick line.

Our defeat to be sure is a rueful affair for the honour of the troops; but the Duke is gone, it seems, with the rapidity of a cannon-bullet, to undefeat us again. The common people in town at least know how to be afraid; but we are such uncommon people here as to have no more sense of danger than if the battle had been fought when and where the battle of Cannæ was. The perception of these calamities, and of their consequences, that we are supposed to get from books, is so faintly impressed, that we talk of war, famine, and pestilence, with no more apprehension than of a broken head, or of a coach overturned between York and Edinburgh. I heard three people, sensible, middle-aged men, when the Scotch were said to be at Stamford, and actually were at Derby, talking of hiring a chaise to go to Caxton, a place in the high road, to see the Pretender and the Highlanders as they passed.

I can say no more for Mr. Pope, for what you keep in reserve may be worse than all the rest. It is natural to wish the finest writer, one of them, we ever had, should be an honest man. It is for the interest even of that virtue whose friend he professed himself, and whose beauties he sung, that he should not be found a dirty animal. But, however, this is Mr. Warburton's business, not mine, who may scribble his pen to the stumps, and all in vain, if these facts are so. It is not from what he told me about himself that I thought well of him, but from a humanity and goodness of heart, ay, and greatness of mind, that runs through his private correspondence, not less apparent than are a thousand little vanities and weaknesses mixed with those good qualities, for nobody ever took him for a philosopher.¹

The previous part of the correspondence relative to Pope has never, unfortunately, seen the light. It would seem that Gray had some personal acquaintance with him, for the expression, "It is not from what he told me about himself that I thought well of him," can hardly refer to his published works, though no allusion afterwards occurs to so memorable an interview. In a conversation upon Pope, Gray observed that he had a good heart in spite of

¹ [To Walpole, Feb. 3, 1745, *Works*, vol. ii. p. 181.]

his peevish temper, and remarked of his artificial epistles, that, though not good *letters*, they were better things. He commended an observation of Shenstone, that "Pope had the art of condensing a thought," and he extended his admiration of his poetry to the translation of the *Iliad*. When he heard it criticised as wanting the simplicity of the original, or being rather a paraphrase than a translation, he always said, "There would never be another translation of Homer to equal it."¹ Gray could speak with authority, for he was a finished Greek scholar, a poet, and an exquisite judge of poetry. If Pope's version is not in the style and manner of Homer, it is something nearly as excellent, and in parts it is finer, which is more than can be asserted of any second translation. Cowper keeps close to the sense, but not to the phrases of the Greek, for which he incessantly substitutes feeble circumlocutions. What similitude there is was purchased by sacrificing poetical to literal fidelity. A version which has none of the harmony, and very little of the fire of Homer, can never deserve the praise of being true to the original. Above all, Pope succeeded in making a translation which is perused with delight, while the Homer of Cowper has not many more readers than the Virgil of Dr. Trapp.²

In July, 1746, Gray was in London, attending the trial of the rebel lords; and his account is worth extracting, even after the well-known description which Horace Walpole has given of the same scene.

The Lord High Steward [Lord Hardwicke] was the least part of the show, as he wore only his baron's robe, and was always asking the heralds what he should do next, and bowing or smiling about to his acquaintance; as to his speech, you see it; people hold it very cheap, though several incorrectnesses have been altered in the printed copy. Kilmarnock spoke in

¹ [Nicholls's *Reminiscences*, *Works*, vol. v. p. 37.]

² [This was written in 1853. It is differently criticised in the subsequent Memoir of Cowper. See vol. i. pp. 487, 491.]

mitigation of his crime near half an hour, with a decent courage, and in a strong but pathetic voice. His figure would prejudice people in his favour, being tall and genteel; he is upwards of forty, but to the eye not above thirty-five years of age. What he said appears to less advantage when read. Cromartie (who is about the same age, a man of lower stature, but much like a gentleman) was sinking into the earth with grief and dejection; with eyes cast down, and a voice so low that no one heard a syllable that did not sit close to the bar; he made a short speech to raise compassion. It is now I see printed, and is reckoned extremely fine. I believe you will think it touching and well-expressed: if there be any meanness in it, it is lost in that sorrow he gives us for so numerous and helpless a family. Lady Cromartie, who is said to have drawn her husband into these circumstances, was at Leicester House on Wednesday with four of her children. The Princess saw her, and made no other answer than by bringing in her own children, and placing them by her, which, if true, is one of the prettiest things I ever heard. She was also at the Duke's, who refused to admit her; but she waited till he came to his coach, and threw herself at his knees, while her children hung upon him till he promised all his interest could do; and before, on several occasions, he has been heard to speak very mildly of Cromartie, and very severely of Kilmarnock; so, if any be spared, it will probably be the former, though he had a pension of £600 a year from the Government, and the order for giving quarter to no Englishman was found in his pocket. As to Balmerino, he never had any hopes from the beginning. He is an old soldier-like man, of a vulgar manner and aspect, speaks the broadest Scotch, and shows an intrepidity that some ascribe to real courage, and some to brandy. You have heard, perhaps, that the first day while the peers were adjourned to consider of his plea, and he left alone for an hour and a half in the bar, he diverted himself with the axe that stood by him, played with its tassels, and tried the edge with his finger: and some lord, as he passed by him, saying he was surprised to hear him allege anything so frivolous and that could not possibly do him the least service, he answered, that, as there were so many ladies present, he thought it would be uncivil to give them no amusement. The Duke of Argyle telling him how sorry and how astonished he was to see him engaged in such a cause, "My Lord," says

he, "for the two kings and their rights I care not a farthing which prevailed; but I was starving, and if Mahomet had set up his standard in the Highlands I had been a good Mussulman for bread, and stuck close to the party, for I must eat." The Solicitor-General came up to speak to him too, and he turns about to old Williamson—"Who is that lawyer that talks to me?" "My Lord, it is Mr. Murray." "Ha! Mr. Murray, my good friend," says he, and shook him by the hand, "and how does your good mother? oh! she was of admirable service to us; we should have done nothing without her in Perthshire."¹

It was reported that Mr. Solicitor's mother, who was notorious for her sympathy with the Pretender's cause, had assisted the rebels with provisions. Gray was not present at the execution of Kilmarnock and Balmerino, but he has preserved a curious and characteristic trait of one of the sufferers, which is not related by Walpole.

Old Balmerino, when he had read his paper to the people, pulled off his spectacles, spit upon his handkerchief, and wiped them clean for the use of his posterity; and that is the last page of his history.²

After his trips this year to town, Gray acknowledged that "the world had some attractions to a solitary of six years' standing," and he spoke of his spirits having sunk on his return to his cell, "not indeed to storm or tempest, but a good deal below changeable." The charm of his London holiday was in its novelty, but he appears for the moment to have coveted a gayer life, and to have regretted the poverty which condemned him to

¹ Lord Campbell supposes this speech to have been made by Lord Lovat, and says that Horace Walpole misrepresents the anecdote by transferring it to the trial of Lord Balmerino. (*Lives of the Chief Justices*, vol. ii. p. 363.) Lord Campbell has been misled by his own authorities. The trial of Lovat did not take place till March, 1747, and the letter in which Walpole relates the incident was written August 1, 1746. The other circumstances mentioned in the letter would show that it was correctly dated, even without the confirmation of this letter of Gray, which was written only a few days later—August 13, 1746. [To Wharton, *Works*, vol. iii. pp. 2-5.]

² [To Wharton, Sept. 11, 1746, *Ibid.*, p. 10.]

retirement. "It is a foolish thing that one can't only not live as one pleases, but where and with whom one pleases, without money. Swift somewhere says that money is liberty; and I fear money is friendship too, and society, and almost every external blessing. It is a great though ill-natured comfort to see most of those who have it in plenty, without pleasure, without liberty, and without friends."¹

His Cambridge life, however, was just at this time more animated than usual. The majority of the fellows of Pembroke Hall, headed by Mr. Brown,—an intimate friend of Gray, who said that he wanted nothing but a foot in height and his own hair to make him a little old Roman—had quarrelled with their master, Dr. Roger Long. Three fellowships were vacant, and Dr. Long refused to admit the persons elected by the majority, under the pretence that his office entitled him to a veto. Two of the candidates were adopted by the fellows on the express recommendation of Gray—a Mr. Tuthill of his own college, Peterhouse, and Mason, then of St. John's, whose juvenile poems he had recently revised at the request of a mutual acquaintance. It was thus that the close alliance commenced between Mason and Gray. The college war continued for two years without victory inclining to either side, when Dr. Long, whose name still survives at Cambridge as a contriver of astronomical toys, and who is styled in the correspondence of the poet, "Lord of the great Zodiac, the glass Uranium, and the Chariot that goes without horses," succumbed to "the little old Roman," and Mason and Tuthill were borne in in triumph.² In the meantime Gray took an active part, as well as an eager interest, in the contest. Everything depended on the disaffected party retaining a majority of the fellows on their side, and in reviewing, in 1747, their future prospects, Gray gives a lively sketch

¹ [To Wharton, Dec. 11, 1746, *Works*, vol. iii. p. 23.]

² [To Wharton, March 9, 1749, *Ibid.*, p. 58.]

of poor Christopher Smart, who was one of the electors. The comedy, of which the poet speaks, was called a "Trip to Cambridge, or the Grateful Fair," and was actually performed by Kit's company of undergraduates in the Hall of Pembroke College.

As to Smart, he must necessarily be *abîmé* in a very short time. His debts daily increase; Addison, I know, wrote smartly to him last week; but it has had no effect that signifies, only I observe he takes hartshorn from morning to night lately: in the meantime he is amusing himself with a comedy of his own writing, which he makes all the boys of his acquaintance act, and intends to borrow the Zodiac room, and have it performed publicly. Our friend Lawman, the mad attorney, is his copyist; and truly the author himself is to the full as mad as he. His piece, he says, is inimitable, true sterling wit and humour, and he can't hear the prologue without being ready to die with laughter. He acts five parts himself, and is only sorry he can't do all the rest. He has also advertised a collection of Odes; and for his vanity and faculty of lying, they are come to their full maturity. All this, you see, must come to a jail, or Bedlam, and that without any help, almost without pity.¹

It came to a jail and Bedlam both. Before the year was out he was arrested at the instance of a London tailor; his Cambridge debts alone amounted to £350, and he would have gone straight to prison if the fellows of his college had not interposed to conciliate his creditors, notwithstanding the "lies, impertinence, and ingratitude" to which he treated them in return. Gray ascribed these failings to his drunken habits, and was sanguine enough to hope that he would get the better of the master vice.² This was so far from being the case, that when he removed to London he used, according to Dr. Johnson, to walk for exercise to the alehouse, but was always *carried* back. His eccentricities increasing, he was shut up in an asylum, though one, at least, of his lunatic impulses was the sanest he ever manifested in his life. "He insisted," said Dr.

¹ [*Works*, vol. iii. p. 41.]

² [To Wharton, Nov. 30, 1747, *Ibid.*, p. 48.]

Johnson, "on people praying with him; and I'd as lief pray with Kit Smart as anyone else. Another charge was, that he did not love clean linen; and I have no passion for it."¹ His insanity was favourable to his poetic powers, for by far the finest lines he composed made part of a Song of David, which he indented with a key on the wainscot of his room when deprived of pen and ink. He was cured of his worst symptoms, but, after an interval of liberty in which he tried to prosecute the friends who were instrumental in incarcerating him, one description of confinement was exchanged for another, and he died within the Rules of the King's Bench prison.

In the latter part of the summer of 1746 Walpole took a house at Windsor for a short period, and the proximity produced a constant intercourse between him and his former friend. The poet showed him his manuscript pieces, and we may be sure, from Walpole's published language, that he lauded them to the skies. We find him, in October, transcribing the Ode on the Prospect of Eton College in a letter to Mr. Conway, and bespeaking his admiration for it. Walpole's opinions on the literature of his day were almost exclusively governed by his personal relations with the authors, and his criticisms seldom consist of anything better than adulation or abuse. Warm and unqualified praise was exactly what was wanted to give confidence to the timid nature of Gray, and accordingly, when Dodsley was gathering materials in 1747 for a Collection of Poems, he was nothing backward to allow three of his pieces to come out from their hiding-place—the Ode on Spring, On the Prospect of Eton College, and On the Death of the Cat. The last of these had been written in the January of that year to commemorate the drowning of one of Walpole's favourites, and appears to us a failure. The author has tried to be at once serious and trifling, poetical and familiar, and in the attempt to produce these

¹ [Boswell's *Johnson*, p. 135.]

opposite effects he has missed them altogether. The moral which was intended to give purpose to the narration is not, as Dr. Johnson has shown, properly deduced, and it is as tame and trite as it was forced. We agree with Mr. Mitford that the third stanza, describing the fish, is the best. The other two poems were thought by their author to be equal in merit, but, Walpole or Dodsley discerning the great superiority of the Ode on the Prospect of Eton College, it was determined to bring it out separately. It was published in folio in 1747, without the name of the author, and was the first *English* production of Gray that appeared in print.¹ Little notice was taken of it at the time—less perhaps because those who read it were insensible to its merits, than because a short anonymous poem did not invite curiosity.

In August, 1748, Gray had completed about a hundred lines—all he ever wrote—on the Alliance of Education and Government. For this also it is not unlikely that we are indebted to the impulse given to his ambition by Walpole's applause. Gibbon called it an "exquisite specimen of a philosophic poem"; and even Johnson admits that it has many excellent lines. But despite the beauties of what we possess, we question if we sustain much loss by its being left incomplete. Unless he could have introduced more freedom into the flow of the verse, and interwoven sentiments more adapted to the ordinary sympathies of mankind, the work would have grown heavy if he had proceeded far. His subject offered as fair a field for attractive speculation as the Essay on Man, but there is no comparison in the interest. Pope took care not to trust to his argument and his metaphysics. He adorned his poem with ideas and illustrations which come home to all the world, and the consequence is that, while no one quotes the Alliance of Education and Government, the Essay on Man has furnished a multiplicity

¹ A short Latin poem from his pen made part of the Cambridge Collection of Verses on the marriage of the Prince of Wales, which was printed in 1736.

of passages, lines, and phrases which are in the mouth of every educated person who speaks the English tongue.

The house in Cornhill in which Gray was born was burnt down in 1748. With the sum for which it was insured, and a gift of a hundred pounds towards rebuilding it from an aunt, the poet was not above fifty pounds out of pocket, and for this slight expenditure he must have been amply compensated by the superior value of a new house over an old. Shortly after the fire he went to London, and gives a ludicrous account of the sympathy he met with from his friends. "Their methods of consolation were indeed very extraordinary; they were all so sorry for my loss that I could not choose but laugh: one offered me opera tickets, insisted upon carrying me to the grand masquerade, desired me to sit for my picture; others asked me to their concerts, or dinners and suppers at their houses; or hoped I would drink chocolate with them while I stayed in town. All my gratitude, or, if you please, my revenge, was to accept of everything they offered me: if it had been but a shilling I would have taken it. Thank Heaven, I was in good spirits, else I could not have done it. I profited all I was able of their civilities, and am returned into the country loaded with their *bontés* and *politesses*, but richer still in my own reflections, which I owe in great measure to them too. Suffer a great master to tell them you, for me, in a better manner."¹

The great master was the French poet Gresset, and the purport of the verses quoted from him was to express contempt for the fatiguing frivolities of fashionable life. The charm which beguiled Gray two years before was already gone, and he ended by calling London "that tiresome, dull place, where all people under thirty find so much amusement."² Still his ridicule, if it was genuine, of the civilities which greeted him was quite misplaced,

¹ [To Wharton, June 5, 1748, *Works*, vol. iii. p. 51.]

² [To Nicholls, Nov. 19, 1764, *Ibid.*, vol. v. p. 59.]

for they were the effects of a kindness which could be manifested in no other way, unless he expected his friends to make a charitable collection for him. They had not the sagacity to discover that *their* diversions were not *his*, but he would have accepted the will for the deed if he had called to mind one of his own wise and feeling reflections: "Our imperfections may at least excuse, and perhaps recommend us to one another. Methinks I can readily pardon sickness, and age, and vexation, for all the depredations they make within and without, when I think they make us better friends and better men, which I am persuaded is often the case. I am very sure I have seen the best-tempered, generous, tender young creatures in the world, that would have been very glad to be sorry for people they liked, when under any pain, and could not, merely for want of knowing rightly what it was themselves."¹

In August, 1750, Gray writes to Dr. Wharton: "You have doubtless heard of the loss I have had in Dr. Middleton, whose house was the only easy place one could find to converse in at Cambridge. For my part, I find a friend so uncommon a thing that I cannot help regretting even an old acquaintance, which is an indifferent likeness of it; and though I don't approve the spirit of his books, methinks 'tis a pity the world should lose so rare a thing as a good writer."² The poet was a great admirer of the easy elegance which distinguished the style of the *Life of Cicero*. The spirit which he disapproved was the covert scepticism that pervades the miscellaneous writings of Middleton. Infidelity in all its garbs had always an uncompromising opponent in Gray. He said that it took away the best consolation of man, and substituted nothing in its place. While delighting in the pleasantries of Voltaire, and ranking his tragedies next to those of Shakespeare, he detested him for his impiety. "No one,"

¹ [To Chute, Oct. 12, 1746, *Works*, vol. iii. p. 21.]

² [Aug. 9, 1750, *Ibid.*, p. 73.]

he remarked prophetically, "knows the mischief that man will do"; and when Mr. Nicholls went abroad, he exacted from him a solemn promise that he would not go to Ferney.¹ He had little less dislike to Hume, and had, besides, a low opinion of the mental power displayed in speculations which seemed to him the produce of vanity, prejudice, and sophistry. "A turbid and shallow stream," he wrote to Dr. Beattie, "often appears to our apprehensions very deep. A professed sceptic can be guided by nothing but his present passions (if he has any) and interests; and to be masters of his philosophy we need not his books or advice, for every child is capable of the same thing without any study at all."² It is a conclusive proof of the intrinsic impotence of the attacks upon Christianity, that no infidel has ever succeeded in giving vitality to his sceptical effusions. The sneers of Gibbon—argument he has none—are only read because they are incorporated with his history, and are felt to be a blot upon his luminous page.

On the 12th June, 1750, Gray announced to Walpole that "a thing," whose beginning he had seen long before, had at last got an end to it, "a merit," he added, "that most of my writings have wanted and are like to want."³ This thing was the far-famed *Elegy*. Walpole showed it about, copies were taken, and in February, 1751, Gray received a letter from the editors of the *Magazine of Magazines* informing him that his "ingenious poem" was in the press, and begging, "not only his indulgence, but the *honour* of his correspondence." "I am not at all disposed," said the poet, "to be either so indulgent or so correspondent as they desire." In fact, he was horrified at the bare idea of seeming to be in alliance with the *Magazine of Magazines*, and entreated Walpole to get Dodsley to forestall them by printing the *Elegy* immediately without the name of the author, and with a

¹ [Nicholls's *Reminiscences*, *Works*, vol. v. p. 31.]

² [July 2, 1770, *Ibid.*, vol. iv. p. 190.]

³ [*Ibid.*, vol. iii. p. 71.]

line or two prefixed, to the effect that it came into the hands of the publisher by accident.¹ Gray wished the world to know that he had been forced before it, for, extraordinary as it may appear, he declared, and his word may be taken on the point, that the piece was never intended for the public, and that his sole ambition was to gratify a few of his friends.² It was received with delight, and quickly ran through eleven editions. Gray was surprised at its popularity, and Mason replied, *Sunt lacrymæ rerum et mentem mortalia tangunt*. The poet wrote the line on a copy which was lying on the table, and said, "This shall be its future motto." Afterwards, when his Odes met with a cold reception, he conceived the erroneous idea, which Mason, who thought that his own works would have been more admired if the world had been endowed with better taste, did his utmost to encourage, that the success was entirely due to the subject and not in the least to the poetry. Gray told Dr. Gregory with considerable bitterness, "that the public would have received it as well if it had been written in prose."³

The Long Story grew out of the Elegy. Among the persons who saw the latter in manuscript was Lady Cobham, who lived at the Mansion House at Stoke, and she desired to become acquainted with her poetical neighbour. Two ladies who were staying with her undertook to call upon him. He chanced to be from home, and the arrival of visitors from the great house excited a considerable commotion among his humbler relatives. He soon got upon easy terms with Lady Cobham, and turned the history of the acquaintance into a ballad.⁴ Mason states that when it was handed about in manuscript, some called it a masterpiece of original humour, others a wild and fantastic farrago, and that, on its publication, opinions

¹ [To Walpole, Feb. 11, 1751, *Works*, vol. iii. p. 79.]

² [To Wharton, Dec. 18, 1751, *Ibid.*, vol. iii. p. 100.]

³ [Mitford's *Life of Gray*, *Poetical Works*, p. xxii.]

⁴ [Jacob Bryant's Recollections of Gray, *Ibid.*, p. lxiv.]

were equally divided. On reprinting it in his *Memoirs* of the poet, he found it necessary to subjoin notes telling the public what to admire and where to laugh. Gray had an excellent saying, that good writing not only required great parts, but the very best of those parts;¹ and the *Long Story* is now usually considered to have been the product of the worst of his. It is a mere jingle, without wit or poetry, and should have been confined to the ladies for whose amusement it was penned.

At the instigation of Horace Walpole, Mr. Bentley, the son of the celebrated scholar, employed his pencil in illustrating what Gray had written. The designs, like the character of the artist, were wild and grotesque, and both Gray and Walpole appear to have admired them beyond their merit. Gray's poetical works consisted at that time of four little Odes, the *Elegy*, and the *Long Story*. He thought that their appearance pompously adorned would expose him to ridicule, which was what he dreaded above all things; and he insisted that the title of the publication should be, "Designs of R. Bentley for Six Poems of Mr. T. Gray," instead of "The Poems of Gray, with Illustrations by Bentley."² He was next thrown into consternation by learning that Dodsley, with the connivance of Walpole, had a portrait of the author engraving for a frontispiece. He averred that if it appeared he should go out of his wits; that it would be worse than the pillory; and that if, without being warned, he had received the book with such a plate, he should have been struck with a palsy.³ In all this there was more of pride than modesty. He suspected people would sneer, and that his dignity would suffer. The *Long Story* he would never allow to be reprinted, and said that he had only permitted it originally for the sake of Mr. Bentley's designs,⁴ nor would he have been enticed into

¹ [*Works*, vol. iii. p. 73, from Mason.]

² [To Dodsley, *Ibid.*, vol. iv. p. 103.]

³ [To Walpole, Jan. 1753, *Ibid.*, vol. iii. p. 106.]

⁴ [To Beattie, Dec. 24, 1757, *Ibid.*, vol. iv. p. 91.]

it then but for the extravagant encomiums of Walpole. On a Mrs. French remarking that she did not know what to make of it, for it aimed at everything and meant nothing, Horace replied, that he had always taken her for a woman of sense, and was sorry to be undeceived.¹ Gray believed Walpole at the outset, but he soon discovered that the world was of the opinion of Mrs. French. It proved, Mason says, the least popular of his productions. The most valuable result of this edition, which appeared in 1753, was some lines which the poet addressed to Mr. Bentley on his designs, and which, though the piece is unfinished, must be ranked among his happiest efforts.

A proof of one of the engravings for the *Elegy*, representing a village funeral, was sent to Gray at Stoke. His aunts saw him take it from the letter, and supposing it to be a burying ticket, asked him if anybody had left him a ring. "Heaven forbid," he said, "they should suspect it to belong to any verses of mine—they would burn me for a poet."² Is it possible that he had never made his family a party to his writings, and that his fond mother should have lived and died in ignorance of his immortal verse? The circumstance is not incredible if, as was probable, the good sisters had no appreciation of poetry, for he had an abhorrence of being read by tasteless people, and disliked their praise as much as their censure.

His mother was ill in bed when the engraving of the funeral arrived, and on the 11th March, 1753, she expired, "after a long and painful struggle for life,"³ at the age of sixty-seven. It is singular that she should have died, like her husband, of gout, for the disease is one which hardly ever attacks the female sex. The epitaph which the poet caused to be engraved upon her monument describes her as "the careful, tender mother of many children, *one of*

¹ [To Wharton, Dec. 18, 1751, *Works*, vol. iii. p. 99.]

² [To Walpole, Jan., 1753, *Ibid.*, p. 106.]

³ [To Wharton, March 15, 1753, *Ibid.*, p. 107.]

whom alone had the misfortune to survive her";¹ but the strongest proof of his affection is the celebrated passage in the letter to Mr. Nicholls, which, often as it has been quoted, we must extract once more. "It is long since that I heard you were gone in haste into Yorkshire, on account of your mother's illness, and the same letter informed me that she was recovered; otherwise I had then wrote to you, only to beg you would take care of her, and to inform you that I had discovered a thing very little known, which is, that in one's whole life one never can have any more than a single mother. You may think this is obvious, and what you call a trite observation. You are a green gosling! I was at the same age very near as wise as you, and yet I never discovered this (with full evidence and conviction I mean) till it was too late. It is thirteen years ago, and seems but yesterday; and every day I live it sinks deeper into my heart."²

Gray visited his aunts at Stoke in the autumn of the year in which his mother died: and finding that the place did but recall the many anxious hours he had passed there, and remind him of the loss in which his fears had terminated, he hastened to change the scene. "My thoughts," he said pathetically, "now signify nothing to anyone but myself."³ Mason had recently sent him an account of his attendance at the death-bed of a friend, and Gray replied, "I have seen what you describe, and know how dreadful it is; I know too I am the better for it. We are all idle and thoughtless things, and have no sense, no use in the world any longer than that sad impression lasts; the deeper it is engraved the better."⁴ This was always his language. It was thus that he wrote to Mr. Nicholls in 1766: "He who best knows our nature (for He made us what we are), by such

¹ [*Works*, vol. i. p. xxxi.]

² [Aug. 26, 1766, *Ibid.*, p. 60.]

³ [To Mason, Nov. 5, 1753, *Correspondence of Gray and Mason*, p. 22.]

⁴ [*Ibid.*, p. 23.]

afflictions recalls us from our wandering thoughts and idle merriment, from the insolence of youth and prosperity, to serious reflection, to our duty and to Himself: nor need we hasten to get rid of these impressions. Time, by the appointment of the same power, will cure the smart, and in some hearts soon blot out all the traces of sorrow; but such as preserve them longest, for it is left partly in our own power, do perhaps best acquiesce in the will of the Chastiser."¹ Whenever he touches upon these trite topics he is tender, natural, and we must add—though on such a subject it is a trifling consideration—original too.

In December, 1754, Gray completed the Ode on the Progress of Poetry. It was commenced two or three years before, and the opening was shown to Mason, who told him that, though it breathed the very spirit of Pindar, it was not of a nature to suit the public taste. Gray was easily discouraged, and as often as Mason urged him to continue it, he answered, "No; you have thrown cold water upon it."² Indeed, if Walpole is to be trusted, Mason coupled his praise of both the great odes with so many cavils that the author was almost tempted to destroy them. Upon winding off the Progress of Poetry, Gray mentioned that he had one or two more ideas in his head, which resulted in his second Pindaric—The Bard,—and the beautiful fragment on Vicissitude. Walpole said that Gray was now "in flower."³ He had only two such seasons in his life.

The first instalment of the Bard was sent to Dr. Wharton in the summer of 1755. After the poet had got through two-thirds of his task he came to a stand, and for nearly two years he could not bring himself to advance it a single line, when the accident of hearing a blind Welshman play upon the harp at Cambridge re-

¹ [Sept. 2, 1766, *Works*, vol. v. p. 63.]

² [*Ibid.*, vol. ii. p. 159, from Mason.]

³ [*Ibid.*, vol. i. pp. xxxii., xxxiii.]

kindled his enthusiasm, and enabled him to take the final stride. Mr. Nicholls asked him how he felt when he composed it, and he answered, "Why, I felt myself the bard."¹ The poem being finished, he was, contrary to his custom, in haste to publish, and sold it in June, 1757, to Dodsley, in conjunction with the Progress of Poetry, for forty guineas. Walpole, who had just set up his press at Strawberry Hill, begged that the odes might be the first fruits of his types. They appeared at the beginning of August, and twelve or thirteen hundred copies were speedily sold, but opinion was almost unanimous in condemning them. "It appeared," says Dr. Wharton, "that there were not twenty people in England who liked them."

The general fault complained of was obscurity. One great person, whose name is not given, said that having read them seven or eight times, he should not now have above thirty questions to ask the author.² Mr. Fox, afterwards Lord Holland, objected that if the Bard sung his song only once, it was quite impossible that Edward I. should have understood him,³ and Lord Barrington believed that the lines—

Enough for me ; with joy I see
The different doom our fates assign ;
Be thine despair, and scepter'd care,
To triumph and to die are mine—

were the parting words of Charles I. to Oliver Cromwell.⁴ How he reconciled this version with the speaker immediately plunging headlong into the stream does not appear. Owen Cambridge told Walpole that Lord Chesterfield heard one Stanley read them for his own. Walpole said that my lord's deafness must have led him into a mistake, and Cambridge responded, "Perhaps they

¹ [Gray's *Works*, vol. v. p. 34.]

² [To Hurd, Aug. 25, 1757, *Ibid.*, vol. iii. p. 166.]

³ [To Wharton, Sept. 7, 1757, *Ibid.*, p. 169.]

⁴ [To Wharton, Aug. 17, 1757 ; to Hurd, Aug. 25, 1757, *Ibid.*, pp. 165, 166, 169.]

are Stanley's, and, not caring to own them, he gave them to Gray."¹ This shows the low idea that Cambridge, who was a man of letters, entertained at that time both of the odes and of Gray. Even the few admirers wished that the author had been clearer.

Gray from the first had been advised by his friends to append explanatory notes, and he answered that what could not be understood without them had better not be understood at all.² Three gentlemen were overheard saying at York races that he was "impenetrable and inexplicable," and should have told in prose the meaning of his verse.³ It was precisely in this humiliating light that a commentary presented itself to his mind, and accounts for his aversion to it. "I would not," he wrote, "have put another note to save the souls of all the owls in London. It is extremely well as it is—nobody understands me, and I am perfectly satisfied."⁴ But notwithstanding the good humour with which he treated the criticisms, he was not satisfied at all. In a postscript to the very letter in which the expression of his contentment occurs, he suggests to Mason to get his curate to write an explanatory pamphlet, though he is not to know that the notion proceeded from Gray.⁵ The hint was not taken, and when the poet republished his works he condescended to become his own commentator. He did it, he said, out of spite, just to tell the gentle reader that Edward I. was not Oliver Cromwell, nor Queen Elizabeth the Witch of Endor.⁶ It is not easy to see how the public were spited by a compliance with its demand. The only inference to be drawn is, that Gray did not feel the indifference he affected, and was anxious to remove any obstacles to success.

¹ [Gray's *Works*, vol. i. p. lii.] ² [To Walpole, *Ibid.*, vol. iii. p. 162.]

³ [To Wharton, Oct. 7, 1757, *Ibid.*, p. 177.]

⁴ [To Mason, *Correspondence of Gray and Mason*, p. 99.]

⁵ [*Ibid.*, p. 101.]

⁶ [To Beattie, Feb. 1; to Walpole, Feb. 25, 1768, *Works*, vol. iv. pp. 101, 112.]

In 1760 there appeared two burlesque odes by Colman and Lloyd, one inscribed to Obscurity—"that," said Gray, "is me"—the other to Oblivion, which was directed against Mason.¹ In these parodies, which are good specimens of a bad kind of writing, the friends are treated with great contempt both as men and poets. "Lest," Gray wrote to his fellow-victim, "people should not understand the humour, letters come out in Lloyd's Evening Post to tell them who and what it was that he meant, and says it is like to produce a great combustion in the literary world. So if you have any mind to *combustle* about it well and good; for me I am neither so literary nor so combustible."² He informed Dr. Wharton, in the same pleasant strain, that a bookseller, to whom he was unknown, had recommended him to purchase the satire upon himself as "a very pretty thing." Here again it would be a mistake to conclude that he was as unconcerned as he seemed. He was too sensitive not to be annoyed at the ridicule, and much too proud to show that he was hurt. The fire of his imagination, which could only be kept alive by being blown up, was completely extinguished by the reception of his Pindarics, and except a single piece which was written upon compulsion, he attempted no more serious verse.

The year before the Bard was published a slight incident occurred, which the poet said might be looked upon as a sort of era in a life so barren of events as his.³ We find him requesting Dr. Wharton, in January, 1756, to procure him a rope-ladder, "for my neighbours," he added, "make every day a great progress in drunkenness, which gives me reason to look about me."⁴ His fastidious and monastic habits were likely to provoke the youthful love of practical jokes; and two or three

¹ [To Wharton, *Works*, vol. iii. p. 250.]

² [June 7, 1760, *Correspondence of Gray and Mason*, p. 206.]

³ [To Wharton, March 25, 1756, *Works*, vol. iii. p. 148.]

⁴ [Jan. 9, 1756, *Ibid.*, p. 147.]

undergraduates who had rooms off the same staircase, and who had frequently plagued him with their uproar, got intelligence of the ladder, and raised a cry of fire at midnight, in the hope of seeing Gray descend from his window. He complained to the master, Dr. Law, who treated the occurrence lightly, and called it "a boyish frolic."¹ The poet, indignant that no more regard was paid to his remonstrance, removed, in March, to Pembroke College, of which his principal Cambridge friend, Mr. Brown, was the President. The apprehension of fire had been the cause of his leaving Peterhouse, and he met with the reality at Pembroke. Some years afterwards the chambers opposite his own were destroyed, and in describing the occurrence, he says, with his usual quiet humour, "I assure you it is not amusing to be waked between two and three o'clock in the morning, and to hear, 'Don't be frightened, sir, but the college is all of a fire.'"²

At the close of the year 1757 he was offered the poet-laureateship by the lord chamberlain, the Duke of Devonshire, with an assurance that he would not be called upon for the customary odes. When it is remembered that his predecessor was Cibber, and his substitute Whitehead, the compliment was questionable, and certainly Gray did not feel flattered by the preference. "Though I very well know," he wrote to Mason, "the bland emollient saponaceous qualities both of sack and silver, yet if any great man would say to me, 'I make you Rat-catcher to his Majesty, with a salary of £300 a year and two butts of the best malaga; and though it has been usual to catch a mouse or two for form's sake, in public, once a year, yet to you, sir, we shall not stand upon these things,' I cannot say that I should jump at it; nay, if they would drop the very name of the office and call me Sinecure to the King's Majesty, I should still feel a little awkward,

¹ [To Wharton, March 25, 1756, *Works*, vol. iii. p. 148 and note; Mitford's *Life*, in Gray's *Poetical Works*, p. xxxii., note.]

² [To Nicholls, Jan. 28, 1768, *Works*, vol. v. p. 72.]

and think everybody I saw smelt a rat about me. Nevertheless I interest myself a little in the history of it, and rather wish somebody may accept it that will retrieve the credit of the thing, if it be retrievable, or ever had any credit. Rowe was, I think, the last man of character that had it. Eusden was a person of great hopes in his youth, though at last he turned out a drunken parson. Dryden was as disgraceful to the office from his character, as the poorest scribbler could have been from his verses. The office itself has always humbled the possessor hitherto, even in an age when kings were somebody, if he were a poor writer by making him more conspicuous, and if he were a good one by setting him at war with the little fry of his own profession, for there are poets little enough to envy even a poet-laureate."¹

[Gloomy as had been the previous life of Gray, the portion which remained was still more overcast. His health in 1758 was better than ordinary, "but my spirits," he wrote to Mr. Brown, "are always many degrees below changeable, and seem to myself to inspire everything around me with *ennui* and dejection; some time or other all these things must come to a conclusion, till which day I shall remain very sincerely yours."² After his mother's death he spent the largest part of his summer vacations in little tours about the country, and from these he derived more pleasure than from anything else. His present solace was to visit all houses and objects of interest, to trace their history, to mark the taste of successive ages, and to register the particulars in a formal catalogue. "To think," he said, "though to little purpose, has been the chief amusement of my days; and when I would not or cannot think, I dream. At present I feel myself able to write a catalogue, or to read the Peerage book, or Miller's Gardening Dictionary, and am thankful that there are such employments, and such authors in the

¹ [Dec. 19, 1757, *Correspondence of Gray and Mason*, p. 112.]

² [Sept. 7, 1758, *Ibid.*, p. 160.]

world. Some people, who hold me cheap for this, are doing perhaps what is not half so well worth while." His pilgrimage to cathedrals, tombs, and ruins put him upon investigating the history of Gothic architecture. There were then no trustworthy guides to the art, and he studied buildings instead of books. In tracing the progression of styles he found that the family arms which were sculptured upon many edifices would often assist him in the determination of dates. He set to work upon genealogies with the avidity of a herald; and in his copy of Dugdale's *Origines*, now in the British Museum, he has filled in and described upon the margin the arms of all the families mentioned.¹ When with vast labour he had threaded the intricacies of the science, and could assign at a glance any portion of a building to its proper era, Mason urged him to publish the results of his researches, and offered to make the drawings for the purpose. But Gray knew no other use for time than to while it away; and, satisfied that his pursuits should be entertaining to himself, he would never submit to the slightest exertion to make them beneficial to others.

Not long before he had agreed to write, in conjunction with Mason, a *History of English Poetry*, in which the authors were to be classified according to schools. He began at the beginning—examined into all the sources from which English poetry was derived, into the origin of rhyme, and the early rules of metre. He transcribed large portions of Lydgate from a variety of manuscripts, and translated the specimens of Norse and Welsh song which are printed in his works. What little he put upon paper is enough to show that he would have treated the subject with the depth of a scholar, and the taste and elegance of a poet; but the plan was large, the workman slow; and before he had fairly laid the foundation he abandoned the design.²

¹ [*Correspondence of Gray and Mason*, p. 243, note.]

² [*Works*, vol. i. p. lxxxvi.]

A few of his opinions of modern authors have been reported by his friends, or are to be found scattered about his letters. He set Shakespeare high above all poets of all ages and countries.¹ He admitted that he was open to criticism of every kind, but said that he should not care to be the person who undertook it.² After observing, in his comments upon the atheism which then prevailed in France, that perhaps they had no soul on the continent, he adds, "I do think we have such things in England—Shakespeare, for example, I believe had several to his own share."³ Spenser, who is the poet's poet, he always read for a considerable time before commencing composition.⁴ He had an enthusiastic admiration of Dryden, and told Dr. Beattie that if there was any excellence in his own numbers, he owed it entirely to that great master, whose ear was admirable, and his choice of words and his versification singularly happy and harmonious.⁵ His Absalom and Achitophel, and his Theodore and Honoria, he placed in the first rank of excellence, and esteemed his plays as poetry though not as dramas.⁶ His prose he considered to be little inferior to his verse.⁷ Tickell's ballad of Colin and Lucy he thought the prettiest in the world, and it would be prettier still if the last eight lines had been omitted.⁸ Of Thomson's Castle of Indolence, he observed, rather coldly, that it had some good stanzas,⁹ but allowed that he had one talent in greater perfection than any other poet—that of depicting the various appearances of nature. When he attempted to be moral, Gray considered that he failed and became verbose¹⁰—an objec-

¹ [Nicholls's *Reminiscences*, Gray's *Works*, vol. v. p. 35.]

² [To Wharton, Dec. 19, 1752, *Ibid.*, vol. ii. p. 104.]

³ [To Walpole, March 17, 1771, *Ibid.*, vol. iv. p. 190.]

⁴ [Nicholls's *Reminiscences*, *Ibid.*, vol. v. p. 34.]

⁵ [*Ibid.*, vol. iv. p. 68, note, from Mason.]

⁶ [Nicholls's *Reminiscences*, *Ibid.*, vol. v. p. 35.]

⁷ [*Ibid.*, p. 38.]

⁸ [To Walpole [1751], *Ibid.*, vol. iii. p. 89.]

⁹ [To Wharton, June 5, 1748, *Ibid.*, vol. iii. p. 53.]

¹⁰ [Nicholls's *Reminiscences*, *Ibid.*, vol. v. p. 36.]

tion to which there are surely many single exceptions, as in the pathetic passage of the peasant overwhelmed in the snow-storm, and the lines which immediately follow, beginning, "Ah! little think the gay, licentious proud." Nothing can be more just than his character of Dr. Akenside's Pleasures of the Imagination, and the concluding reflection is one which should not be lost upon critics:—

It seems to me above the middling, and now and then, but for a little while, rises even to the best, particularly in description. It is often obscure, and even unintelligible, and too much infected with the Hutcheson jargon; in short, its great fault is that it was published at least nine years too early; and so methinks in a few words I have very nearly dispatched what may, perhaps, for several years have employed a very worthy man worth fifty of myself.¹

Besides his other reasons for moderating the praise of Dr. Akenside, it must be remembered that he had no greater partiality for blank verse than had Dr. Johnson himself; but, like Dr. Johnson, he excepted the Iambics of Milton.² On the appearance of the Odes of Warton and Collins, in 1746, both of them authors then unknown to fame, he thus delivered his opinion:—

It is odd enough, but each is the half of a considerable man, and the one the counterpart of the other. The first has but little invention, very poetical choice of expression, and a good ear. The second, a fine fancy, modelled upon the antique, a bad ear, great variety of words and images, with no choice at all. They both deserve to last some years, but will not.³

He should rather have called the ear of Collins uncertain than bad, for he has lines, stanzas, and one or two entire pieces, that are almost perfect for their music, and when he alleged that his diction was more copious than select, he might have added that much of his

¹ [To Wharton, April 26, 1746, *Works*, vol. ii. p. 191.]

² [Nicholls's *Reminiscences*, *Ibid.*, vol. v. p. 36.]

³ [To Wharton, Dec. 27, 1746, *Ibid.*, vol. iii. p. 28.]

language is peculiarly fine. Of Dyer, Gray said that he had a very poetical imagination, but that he was rough and injudicious;¹ defects which he also ascribed to Matthew Green, whose merits he specified to be a profusion of wit, and wood-notes which frequently broke out into strains of genuine poetry and music.² Shenstone's *School-Mistress* he pronounced "excellent of its kind and masterly,"³ and with equal truth he wrote, after reading his letters—

Poor man! he was always wishing for money, for fame, and other distinctions; and his whole philosophy consisted in living against his will in retirement, and in a place which his taste had adorned; but which he only enjoyed when people of note came to see and commend it: his correspondence is about nothing else but this place and his own writings, with two or three neighbouring clergymen who wrote verses too.⁴

On the *Deserted Village* being read to him he exclaimed, "This man is a poet."⁵ Goldsmith was not so just to Gray, and spoke of his writings in very disparaging terms.⁶ Gray maintained, in opposition to Walpole, that London had all the ease and spirit of an original,⁷ and this before the name of the author was up in the world. He disliked, as might have been expected, the style of Johnson's prose, the noblest specimen of which—the *Lives of the Poets*—he did not live to read, but he respected his understanding and goodness of heart, and used to tell, as an instance of his benevolence, that he would go into the streets with a pocketful of silver, and give the whole of it away in the course of his walk.⁸

Gray set great store by the practical wisdom of Lord

¹ [To Walpole, 1751, *Works*, vol. iii. p. 90.]

² [*Ibid.*, p. 89.] ³ [*Ibid.*]

⁴ [To Nicholls, June 24, 1769, *Ibid.*, vol. iv. p. 133, and vol. v. p. 93.]

⁵ [Nicholls's *Reminiscences*, *Ibid.*, vol. v. p. 36.]

⁶ [Goldsmith's *Life of Parnell*, *Works*, ed. Cunningham, vol. iv. pp. 141, 143.]

⁷ [To Walpole, 1751, *Works*, vol. iii. p. 89.]

⁸ [Nicholls's *Reminiscences*, *Ibid.*, vol. v. p. 33.]

Bacon's Essays and La Bruyère's Characters,¹ and maintained that Machiavel was one of the wisest men that any age in any nation had produced.² He admired the style of Algernon Sydney's Letters from Italy, and of Bishop Sherlock he said that he had given some specimens of pulpit eloquence which were unparalleled in their kind.³ He thought there was good sense and good writing in the sermons of Sterne, and that in Tristram Shandy and the Sentimental Journey he sometimes failed in his humour, but never in pathos.⁴ He praised the Clarissa of Richardson as the best-told story in the world, and specified a merit in it, which has seldom been noticed, that the consistency of the characters is preserved throughout the whole of the lengthy narrative in every action, word, and look. Lovelace alone, he said, was not true to life, owing to the author never having mixed with profligates of rank.⁵ He placed Clarendon at the head of all our historians,⁶ and the casual mention of the "Life written by Himself" is coupled with a remark which is no inappropriate conclusion to this summary of the critical judgments of Gray:—

Do you remember Mr. Cambridge's account of it before it came out; how well he recollected all the faults, and how utterly he forgot all the beauties? Surely the grossest taste is better than such a sort of delicacy.⁷

The taste of Gray was pure, but it was catholic, and he was rather inclined to give prominence to merits than defects. His greatest literary heresy was to believe Ossian genuine, and to think him beautiful, and the world has decided both points the other way.⁸

It is stated of Gray by one of his Cambridge friends,

¹ [*Works*, vol. v. p. 43.]

² [To How, Jan. 12, 1768, *Ibid.*, vol. iv. p. 100.]

³ [Nicholls's Reminiscences, *Ibid.*, vol. v. p. 38.]

⁴ [*Ibid.*, p. 39.]

⁵ [*Ibid.*, p. 46.]

⁶ [*Ibid.*, p. 37.]

⁷ [To Palgrave, July 24, 1759, *Ibid.*, vol. iii. p. 220; *Correspondence of Gray and Mason*, p. 184.]

⁸ [*Works*, vol. iii. pp. 249, 256, 264, etc.; *Gray and Mason*, p. 218.]

Mr. Temple, that he had gone through the whole of the original historians of England, France, and Italy.¹ The British Museum was opened to the public in 1759; and his curiosity not being satiated by printed books, he took lodgings in July in Southampton Row, that he might ransack the manuscripts relative to the history of his own country. The reading-room presented a different scene from what it does at present. There were but five persons in all, two of whom were Prussians; a third who wrote for Lord Royston; Dr. Stukeley, "who," says Gray, "writes for himself, the very worst person he could write for; and I, who only read to know if there is anything worth writing."² He soon discovered matter to his mind, and passed four hours a day in transcribing State papers with the diligence of a copying-clerk. He made London his headquarters till 1762, and all this time continued steady in a pursuit which had no ulterior purpose whatever.

His residence in the great centre of business and news supplied his letters with some interesting paragraphs. He went to the House of Commons and heard Mr. Pitt, the sublime, and his mimic Beckford, the ridiculous. Unfortunately a part of his report is wanting owing to Mason's mutilation of the manuscript.

. . . clever, and forced from him by a nonsensical speech of Beckford's. The second was a studied and puerile declamation on funeral honours on proposing a monument for Wolfe. In the course of it, he wiped his eyes with one handkerchief, and Beckford, who seconded him, cried too, and wiped with two handkerchiefs at once, which was very moving. The third was about Gen. Amherst, and in commendation of the industry and ardour of our American commanders, very spirited and eloquent.³

There was one circumstance connected with the glorious exploit of Wolfe, which, could Gray have known it, must

¹ [*Works*, vol. i. p. lxx.]

² [To Palgrave, *Ibid.*, vol. iii. p. 220; *Gray and Mason*, p. 181.]

³ [To Wharton, Nov. 28, 1758, *Works*, vol. iii. p. 228.]

have afforded him more gratification than all the praise he ever received, and made him feel what it was to be a poet. On the memorable night which preceded the taking of Quebec, when the troops were drifting in silence and darkness down the river, to make the perilous attempt to scale the heights of Abraham, Wolfe murmured, as he lay at the bottom of his boat, the Elegy written in a Country Churchyard. Upon concluding the recitation, he said to his companions in arms, "Now, gentlemen, I would prefer being the author of that poem to the glory of beating the French to-morrow!"¹

Connected with the same great event is an extract from a letter of January 23rd, 1760.

The officer who brought over the news, when the Prince of Wales asked how long Gen. Townsend commanded in the action after Wolfe's death, answered, "A minute, Sir." It is certain he was not at all well with Wolfe, who for some time had not cared to consult with him, or communicate any of his designs to him. He has brought home an Indian boy with him, who goes about in his own dress, and is brought into the room to divert his company. The general after dinner one day had been showing them a box of scalps, and some Indian arms and utensils. When they were gone, the boy got the box, and found a scalp which he knew by the hair belonged to one of his own nation. He grew into a sudden fury, though but eleven years old, and catching up one of the scalping knives, made at his master with intent to murder him, who in his surprise hardly knew how to avoid him; and by laying open his breast, making signs, and with a few words of French jargon that the boy understood, at last with much difficulty pacified him. The first rejoicing night he was terribly frightened, and thought the bonfire was made for him, and that they were going to torture and devour him. He is mighty fond of venison, blood-raw; and once they caught him flourishing his knife over a dog that lay asleep by the fire, because he said it was *bon-manger*!"²

¹ [*Works*, vol. iv. p. 307, from Life of Robinson, in Playfair's *Works*, vol. iv. p. 126.]

² [To Wharton, Jan. 23, 1760, *Works*, vol. iii. p. 231.]

Shortly after the accession of George III., Gray records two observations of the king, and inferred from them that he would prove a worthy occupant of the throne. One was a reproof to the courtly chaplains who preached before him, "I desire those gentlemen may be told that I come here to praise God, and not to hear my own praises"; the other, his reply, when the Duke of Newcastle asked him what sum it was his pleasure should be laid out on the next election, "Nothing, my lord." The duke stared and said, "Sir," and the king reiterated, "Nothing, I say, my lord; I desire to be tried by my country."¹ A year later (Jan. 31, 1761), and we get the following account of the new sovereign and his brothers.

One hears nothing of the king but what gives one the best opinion of him imaginable. I hope it may hold. The royal family run loose about the world, and people do not know how to treat them, nor they how to be treated. They visit and are visited. Some come to the street door to receive them, and that they say is too much; others to the head of the stairs, and that they think is too little. Nobody sits down with them, not even in their own houses, unless at a card table, so that the world are likely to grow weary of the honour. None but the Duke of York enjoy themselves (you know he always did), but the world seems weary of this honour too, for a different reason. I have just heard no bad story of him. When he was at Southampton in the summer, there was a clergyman in the neighbourhood with two very handsome daughters. He had soon wind of them, and dropped in for some reason or other, came again and again, and grew familiar enough to eat a bone of their mutton. At last he said to the father, "Miss —— leads a mighty confined life here, always at home; why can't you let one of them go and take an airing now and then with me in my chaise?" "Ah! Sir," says the parson, "do but look at them, a couple of hale, fresh-coloured, hearty wenches. They need no airing, they are well enough; but there is their mother, poor woman, has been in a declining way many years: if your Royal Highness would give her an airing now and then, it would be doing us a great kindness indeed!"²

¹ [To Mason, Dec. 10, 1760, *Gray and Mason*, p. 236.]

² [To Wharton, Jan. 31, 1761, *Works*, vol. iii. p. 272.]

To this excellent anecdote we must add another, relating to a different subject and period, but which is told by Gray about the same time with the last.

In the year 1688 my Lord Peterborough had a great mind to be well with Lady Sandwich. There was a woman who kept a great coffee-house in Pall Mall, and she had a miraculous canary-bird that piped twenty tunes. Lady Sandwich was fond of such things; had heard of and seen the bird. Lord Peterborough came to the woman and offered her a large sum of money for it, but she was rich and proud of it, and would not part with it for love or money. However, he watched the bird narrowly, observed all its marks and features, went and bought just such another, sauntered into the coffee-room, took his opportunity when no one was by, slipped the wrong bird into the cage, and the right into his pocket, and went off undiscovered to make my Lady Sandwich happy. This was just about the time of the Revolution, and a good while after, going into the same coffee-house again, he saw his bird there, and said, "Well, I reckon you would give your ears now that you had taken my money." "Money!" says the woman, "no, nor ten times that money now; dear little creature; for, if your lordship will believe me (as I am a Christian it is true) it has moped and moped, and never once opened its pretty lips since the day that the poor king went away!"¹

This very loyal Jacobite bird, as the landlady supposed it to be, which moped instead of singing, was no bad type of Gray.

The next occupation to which he had recourse, after he grew tired of copying manuscripts at the British Museum, was Natural History, and to this he remained faithful for the rest of his life. He had an interleaved copy of Linnæus always lying on his table, in which he entered what he read in other authors, or observed for himself.² In his tours he hunted after birds, fishes, insects, and plants, and wrote minute and accurate descriptions of them in Latin. He registered the quarter from which the

¹ [To Brown, Feb. 9, 1761, *Correspondence of Gray and Mason*, p. 258.]

² [*Works*, vol. i. pp. lxxiii., lxxv.]

wind blew, the variation of temperature, the state of the weather, and the day of the month in which birds began to sing, and flowers to blow. Of botany, he said that he only pursued it to save himself the trouble of thinking,¹ and many of his other inquiries into natural phenomena seem not to have been conducted upon any scientific plan, or with a view to any serious deduction. The mere act of accumulating particularities of whatever kind appears to have afforded him pleasure. He was a devourer of travels, and some specimens of his annotations, relative to the Persian, Tartar, and Chinese dynasties, which Mr. Mitford has given from the poet's copy of the *Voyages of Bergeron*,² show the same propensity to revel in small and barren facts. Never did a man with so much mind indulge so largely in studies which left his intellect in abeyance.

In 1764 he interested himself greatly in the contest between Lord Hardwick and Lord Sandwich, for the High Stewardship of the University. The licentious character of Lord Sandwich, who was finally unsuccessful, is said by Mr. Nicholls to have been the sole ground of Gray's hostility to him.³ The poet, in his ardour, wrote for his own private satisfaction a satire, which he did not venture to publish, entitled "The Candidate, or the Cambridge Courtship." Walpole had a copy, and when he discovered it among his papers, after Gray's death, he wrote to Mason in affected raptures, telling him he had found the thing most worth finding in the world, and that it was not the lost books of Livy, nor the longitude, nor the philosopher's stone, nor all Charles Fox had lost. "I am in a panic," he continued, "till there are more copies than mine, and as the post does not go till to-morrow, I am in terror lest the house should be burnt to-night. I have a mind to go and bury a transcript in the field—but then if I should be burnt too nobody

¹ [*Works*, vol. i. p. cxxx., from Mathias.]

² [*Poetical Works*, p. liv.]

³ [*Works*, vol. v. p. 33.]

would know where to look for it."¹ It would have been well if the few lines which inspired Walpole with this ridiculous rhapsody had met with the fate he apprehended. Gray's works would not then have been disfigured by a page which does no credit to his taste or his talents.

Mason was now meditating marriage, but was slow in making up his mind. "He has not properly," said Gray, in accounting for his hesitation, "anything one can call a passion about him, except a little malice and revenge."² He chose his wife for her taciturnity, but however much he may have abhorred pretentious women, he must have been mortified when his unpoetical bride crumpled up, and thrust into her pocket, a copy of complimentary verses with which he presented her on the morning of their marriage.³ Gray describes her as "a pretty, modest, innocent, interesting figure,"⁴ and when, after a brief union of eighteen months, she died of consumption, in March, 1767, the sorrow of her husband testified to her worth. The celebrated epitaph upon her tomb in Bristol cathedral must have owed its fame to the concluding stanza—for the only fine line, in the previous portion, is the invocation to his dead Maria to speak from the tomb—and this concluding stanza is now known to have been the production of Gray. He showed the original verses of Mason to Mr. Nicholls, saying, "This will never do for an ending; I have altered them thus:

"Tell them though 'tis an awful thing to die,—
'Twas e'en to thee—yet the dread path once trod,
Heaven lifts its everlasting portals high,
And bids the pure in heart behold their God."⁵

The longer these lines are meditated, the more their beauty is felt. They have every merit which is proper to the kind of writing. Nothing can be finer than the

¹ [Sept. 16, 1774, *Correspondence of Walpole and Mason*, vol. i. p. 160.]

² [To Wharton, July 10, 1764, *Works*, vol. iv. p. 34.]

³ [*Correspondence of Gray and Mason*, p. 484.]

⁴ [To Brown, Nov. 18, 1766, *Ibid.*, p. 367.]

⁵ [*Ibid.*, vol. v. p. 40.]

eulogy on the deceased, implied in the brief parenthesis—" 'Twas e'en to thee"—nothing more rich in sublime consolation than the sentence which follows—nothing more severely simple in expression. Nor is the stanza a mere memento to the individual—it speaks, as it professes to do, to the hearts of all the world. A month or two afterwards Archbishop Drummond requested Mason to write an epitaph on his daughter. They were both smarting from their recent loss, and they wept together like children. "But," said Mason, in sending Gray the epitaph, which was the result of this tender scene, "it cannot be expected, neither would I wish it, to be equal to what *I have written* from my heart, upon my heart of hearts."¹ It has been remarked, since Mr. Mitford's volume revealed the extent of Mason's obligations in his poetry to the criticisms and suggestions of his friend, that candour required ampler acknowledgments than were ever made in public, but what slight importance the author of *Caractacus* attached to the assistance he received may readily be inferred from his assuming the entire credit of the epitaph on his Maria, even when speaking of it to Gray himself.

Gray visited Scotland in 1765, where he made the acquaintance of Dr. Beattie, at whose suggestion the college of Aberdeen offered to confer upon the English poet the degree of Doctor of Laws. He had once thought of taking it at Cambridge, and gave it up from a dread of being confounded with Dr. Grey, the editor of *Hudibras*, and sharing the ridicule which attached to the Commentary of his namesake. He declined the honour which Aberdeen had designed for him, and assigned as his reason that it might look like a slight to his own university, "where I have passed," he added, "so many easy, and I may say, happy hours of my life."²

In the meanwhile Gray's reputation was rapidly in-

¹ [Mason to Gray, July 15, 1767, *Correspondence*, p. 394.]

² [To Beattie, Oct. 2, 1765, *Works*, vol. iv. p. 63.]

creasing. Dodsley, in 1768, printed two editions of his works, one of 1500 copies, the other of 750, and shortly afterwards an edition, published by Foulis, of Glasgow,¹ was entirely sold off. Another piece of prosperity awaited him. At the close of 1762 the Professorship of Modern History fell vacant, and he was persuaded by his friends to ask the appointment from Lord Bute. He was passed over in favour of the tutor of Sir James Lowther, Mr. Brocket, who fell from his horse, in July, 1768, and broke his neck. The Duke of Grafton was then in power, and had for his private secretary his former tutor, Mr. Stonehewer, an old college friend, and a correspondent of Gray. Without the solicitation, or knowledge of the poet, the private secretary spoke a good word to the premier, and, three days after the death of Brocket, Gray received the appointment. The letter of the Duke was very complimentary, and when the poet attended the levee, which his shyness rendered extremely embarrassing to him, the king told him "he had a particular knowledge of him."² The salary was £400 a year, the equivalent was only to read a lecture a term, and that on a subject with which the new professor was intimately acquainted. He acted on this occasion in his wonted manner. He drew up plans for private and public instruction; he laid down schemes for historical study; he composed the opening of his inauguration thesis, and being completely exhausted by this faint exertion, he relinquished all further attempts to discharge the duties of his easy office. His neglect troubled his conscience, and he relieved his mind by talking of resigning, but clung to his post notwithstanding.³ Though failing health affords some apology for his conduct, there is abundant evidence that his vigour of mind and strength of constitution were more than equal to the demand. It was the self-indulgence, which is the

¹ [Oct. 31, 1768, *Works*, vol. iv. pp. 126, 137, note.]

² [*Ibid.*, vol. iv. pp. 121-7; vol. v. p. 76.]

³ [To Wharton, May 1771, *Poetical Works*, p. xl.]

dark stain upon his career, that kept him inactive—a continuance of those long habits of intellectual epicurism, which shrunk from every mental occupation that involved fatigue. His labours, after all, would have been of no great service if they had assumed the form that he designed, for being free to speak in what language he pleased, he absurdly decided to deliver lectures on English History to an English audience in the Latin tongue.¹ He had an opinion that lectures read in public were generally things of more ostentation than use, and he seems to have resolved that his should be for ostentation alone.

Though Gray's appointment to the Professorship did not produce its proper fruits, it gave rise to an Ode, which was the last poem he penned. In 1769 the Duke of Grafton was elected Chancellor of the University, and Gray, who said that "he did not see why gratitude should sit silent, and leave it to expectation to sing," volunteered to write the panegyrical verses which, according to usage, are set to music, and performed at the installation.² He told his friends, however, that he only offered what he expected the duke to ask, and what it was impossible to refuse. In addition to the exertion of composing, he shrunk from the abuse in which his praise of the chancellor was sure to involve him at a period of such political excitement, and it was long before he could bring himself to commence his Ode. On Mr. Nicholls knocking one morning at his door, he threw it open, and thundered out the first line of the poem,—

Hence! avaunt! 'tis holy ground!

The astonished Mr. Nicholls supposed for a moment that he had gone crazy during the night, but it was the exuberance of his satisfaction at having completed his task.³ He thought meanly of his performance, and said that the music was as good as the words—that the former might

¹ [*Poetical Works*, p. xl., note.]

² [To Stonehewer, June 12, 1769, *Works*, vol. iv. p. 137, note.]

³ [*Ibid.*, vol. v. p. 50.]

be taken for his, and the latter for Dr. Randal's.¹ "I do not," he also wrote to Dr. Beattie, "think the verses worth sending you, because they are by nature doomed to live but a single day."² The world had a higher opinion of them than the author, and, though the Ode for Music is not equal to the Bard, or the Progress of Poetry, it is better than any other that was ever composed for a kindred purpose.

In the winter of 1769 Mr. Nicholls fell in, at Bath, with Bonstetten, a young Swiss upon his travels, and, conceiving a strong partiality for him, gave him a letter of introduction to Gray. His youth, his enthusiasm, his industry, his passion for knowledge, interested the poet, who formed an immediate and violent friendship for him.³ He read English authors with the young foreigner every evening from five till twelve,⁴ and after the departure of Bonstetten, in April, 1770, wrote both of him and to him in terms of greater fondness than he ever bestowed upon any other person. "Such as I am," he said, "I expose my heart to your view, nor wish to conceal a single thought from your penetrating eyes."⁵ But confidential as he professed himself, he could endure no allusion to his poetry or to his past history. When Bonstetten asked him about his works he remained obstinately silent, and to the question, "Why do you not answer me?" he was silent still.⁶ His expectations and designs in life, whatever they may have been, had not been answered, and he was the victim of a profound and increasing chagrin. The society of Bonstetten had helped to beguile him, and the loss of it, to judge from his letters, turned his ordinary gloom into positive misery. "All my time," he wrote, "I am employed with more than Herculean toil in pushing

¹ [To Nicholls, June 24, 1769, *Works*, vol. v. p. 92.]

² [July 16, 1769, *Ibid.*, vol. iv. p. 137.]

³ [*Ibid.*, vol. v. pp. 101 *seq.*]

⁴ [*Ibid.*, p. 181.]

⁵ [May 9, 1770, *Ibid.*, vol. iv. p. 187.]

⁶ [*Ibid.*, vol. v. p. 181, from Bonstetten's *Souvenirs*, p. 118.]

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Walker & Cocherell, ph. sc.

Thomas Gray
from the portrait in the possession of John Murray.

the tedious hours along, and wishing to annihilate them ; the more I strive the heavier they move, and the longer they grow."¹ Happily for himself, the wretched conflict was not far from its close. The gout, to which he had been subject for many years, flew to his stomach, and on the 24th of July, 1771, an attack came on while he was at dinner in the College Hall. He became aware in a day or two that his case was hopeless, and said to a cousin, "Molly, I shall die."² No other comment on his approaching dissolution escaped his lips. He retained his senses till within a few hours of his death, which took place on the night of the 30th of July, in the fifty-fifth year of his age. In obedience to a desire expressed in his will, he was buried at Stoke, by the side of his mother.

Gray was below the middle height ; his figure well made and slight, but inclining latterly to plumpness. His countenance, according to Mr. Bryant, was pleasing, without much expression, and gave no indication of extraordinary powers. The print prefixed to Mason's *Life* is a caricature of his features, which were less prominent and more delicately rounded.³ In spite of sickness and advancing years, the poet continued to the last a coxcomb in his dress, which was of a finical neatness.⁴ Such was his dislike of seeming old, that when his sight began to wane he suffered considerable inconvenience rather than be seen in spectacles. His manners were of a piece with his appearance. He no doubt aimed at refinement, but the impression they left upon others was that of morbid and effeminate delicacy, which was made worse by the circumstance that much of it was not even felt by himself, and was only assumed for effect. His friends, conscious, says Mason, of his superior excellences, thought his fastidiousness not only pardonable,

¹ [April 19, 1770, *Ibid.*, vol. iv. p. 185.]

² [Cole to Walpole ; *Ibid.*, vol. iv. p. 213.]

³ [Gray's *Poetical Works*, p. lxv. ; Walpole to Cole, Gray's *Works*, vol. iv. p. 222.]

⁴ [*Works*, vol. i. p. ci., from Rev. W. Cole.]

but entertaining. Mr. Temple asserts, on the contrary, that it was one of his greatest defects,¹ and Sir Egerton Brydges had been told by several who knew him intimately that it was often exceedingly troublesome to those about him.² Vulgarity in others, either of manner or sentiment, quite upset him.³ His own squeamish and over-acted elegance was vulgarity likewise, but because it belonged to an opposite extreme, and was that of the man-milliner instead of the rustic, he had no suspicion of the failing. In his address he was formal and distant, and to many supercilious.

Several causes combined to keep him silent in company, —a natural reserve, a frequent contempt of his audience, and the loss, as he alleged, of his versatility of mind from living retired.⁴ His taciturnity was increased if the hilarity of the circle rose above a subdued and gentle mirth. "I grow so old," he wrote, when he was just turned forty, "that I own people in high spirits and gaiety overpower me, and entirely take away mine. I can yet be diverted with their sallies, but if they appear to take notice of my dulness it sinks me to nothing." On one occasion when he joined a picnic party, and the laughter-loving company "would allow," as he says, "nothing to the sulkiness of his disposition," Lady Ailesbury reported to Walpole that he opened his lips only once throughout the day, and then it was to reply, "Yes, my lady, I believe so."⁵ He never quite unbent in his own circle, but kept up his dignity, and selected his words and formed them into measured sentences with so much care that his conversation, which was otherwise excellent, wanted the charm of sociality and ease. Walpole and George Montagu agreed in thinking him the worst company in the world. Dr. Beattie, whose acquaintance with him was brief, has asserted that "he

¹ [*Works*, vol. i. p. lxxii.]

² [*Ibid.*, from Brydges's *Censura Literaria*, vol. v. p. 406.]

³ [*Ibid.*] ⁴ [Nicholls's *Reminiscences*, *Works*, vol. v. p. 48.]

⁵ [Walpole's *Letters*, vol. iii. p. 324.]

was happy in a singular facility of expression, and delivered his observations without any appearance of sententious formality";¹ and there can be no difficulty in believing that his studied talk might seem familiarity itself when contrasted with the harangues which were called conversation by the Scotch professors of that day. He was very satirical, and appears to have had a capacity for biting repartees.² He had no toleration for his inferiors in knowledge;³ but neither, on the other hand, did he value talent unless it was associated with worth,⁴ and his friends admit that he practised the virtues he demanded in others. Mason enumerates among his good qualities that he was an economist without avarice, and when his circumstances were at the lowest, gave away sums which would have done credit to an ampler purse. "Remember," Gray nobly says, in writing to Mr. Nicholls, "that *honestas res est læta paupertas*. I see it with respect, and so will every one whose poverty is not seated in their mind: there is but one real evil in it—take my word, who know it well—and that is, that you have less the power of assisting others who have not the same resources to support them."⁵

With his love of literature, and owing all his consideration to it, he yet could not bear to be thought a professed man of letters, but wished to be regarded as a private gentleman who read for his amusement.⁶ He was free from the weakness of being ashamed of his origin, or he would not have introduced into the portion of the Elegy which is descriptive of himself the line—

Fair science frowned not on his *humble birth*,

but the "humble birth" may have made him over eager to prove that he had risen above it. To imagine, never-

¹ [Forbes's *Life of Beattie*, 4to, vol. i. p. 65.]

² [Gray's *Works*, vol. i. pp. lxxiii., lxx.]

³ [*Ibid.*, p. lxxii., from Temple.]

⁴ [Nicholls's *Reminiscences*, *Ibid.*, vol. v. p. 31.]

⁵ [Oct. 14, 1766, *Ibid.*, vol. v. p. 65.]

⁶ [*Ibid.*, vol. i. p. lxxii., from Temple.]

theless, that he endangered his gentility by the exertion of his genius, that he was degraded by the useful exercise of his faculties, and elevated by allowing them to run to waste, must be numbered among the superlative "follies of the wise."

He was considered by Mason to have an excellent taste in music, which is rendered more than doubtful by the fact that he disliked the compositions of Handel. He made one exception in favour of the chorus, "No more to Ammon's God," which he allowed to be wonderful.¹ He played upon the harpsichord, but without much execution,² and sang with judgment, though his voice was feeble. Vocal music was what he chiefly valued.³ He could rarely be brought to display his skill before others; and Walpole, who once prevailed on him after much solicitation, observed the pain to him to be so great that it took away all the pleasure of the performance. When young he drew respectably in crayons,⁴ and, as is proved by the criticisms he wrote on painting and sculpture during his tour in Italy, had a fine eye for form and colour, as well as for the more obvious beauties of expression. Though he said that the only original talent of the English in matters of taste was their skill in laying out grounds, of which neither Italy nor France had the least notion, nor could comprehend when they saw it, he yet set little store by the art, and reserved most of his admiration for bolder prospects.⁵ The diary which he kept of the journey he made to the Lakes, in the autumn of 1769, attests his exquisite relish for the charms of scenery, and evinces a rare faculty for picturesque description. Sir James Mackintosh has gone so far as to assert that "Gray was

¹ [*Works*, vol. i. p. lxxvi., note, from Price's *Essays on the Picturesque*, vol. ii. p. 191.]

² [*Additional Notes to Correspondence of Gray and Mason*, p. 492.]

³ [*Works*, vol. i. p. lxxvi.]

⁴ [*Ibid.*, vol. i. p. cix.]

⁵ [To How, Sept. 10 and Nov., 1763, *Ibid.*, vol. iv. pp. 21, 27; comp. vol. i. p. lxxi., note.]

the *first* discoverer of the beauties of nature in England,"¹—an extraordinary observation for so sensible a man. It would have been just as true to affirm that he was the first discoverer of hills, trees, sky, and water. He was, perhaps, the earliest writer who systematically attempted to depict the appearance of the country in prose, but it would be preposterous to doubt, even if there were not a thousand passages in preceding authors to testify to the fact, that other eyes before his had been alive to the loveliness of an English landscape.

There is no indication that Gray was ever in love, and the singular absence of all allusion to the passion in his poetry confirms the impression that he was an entire stranger to it. A song of two stanzas, composed at the request of Miss Speed, and borrowed from the French, will hardly be considered an exception to the rule. It might have been written by an anchorite. He does not even seem to have taken pleasure in the ordinary society of women, and the wives of his intimates are never mentioned with much cordiality. But he was warm and steady in his friendships, and was justified, when he drew his own character at twenty-four, in putting on the good side "a sensibility for what others feel, an indulgence for their faults and weaknesses, a love of truth, and a detestation of everything else,"²—provided only that we understand by "others" the few associates whom he had taken to his heart. Those few, in spite of his foibles, repaid his attachment, and looked up to him with reverence.

His letters were esteemed by Cowper the best in the language,³ and there are excellent judges who continue to allot them the first place. Considered as a collection, they would be far, in our opinion, from deserving that distinction, even if they had not been eclipsed by Cowper's own. The letters of eminent men are in general thrown

¹ [*Works*, vol. i. p. lxxiv., from *Life of Mackintosh*, vol. ii. p. 427.]

² [To West, April 21, 1741, *Works*, vol. ii. p. 141.]

³ [Cowper to Hill, April 20, 1777.]

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off by the way as the hasty supplement to more important avocations. Cowper's, for the greater part of his life, were the whole produce of his understanding. There is internal evidence that they were not formal compositions, but as the thoughts and doings of which they treat had his undivided attention, the materials were always in a course of preparation. Gray was under circumstances quite as favourable, but it was not his habit to put his mind into his letters to the same extent. Very much of what he tells is related so barely that it conveys no pleasurable information, and much more is about persons and things that have now no interest for the world. Of his own pursuits and habits there is considerably less than we should desire. It is in passages only that his letters exhibit uncommon merit, and, though the better portions are of no great bulk, there is at least variety of excellence,—criticisms, anecdotes, reflections, sketches of character, passages of humour and of pathos, descriptions of public scenes and of natural scenery. One charm pervades the whole, that of perfect ease conjoined to a peculiarity of manner, which reads at first like affectation, but which is soon felt to be natural to the writer, and delightfully characteristic of him. He appears to have been more playfully familiar in his letters than in his conversation.

The poetry of Gray, omitting the few pieces which contribute nothing to his fame, is of two distinct kinds: the minor Odes and the Elegy, which treat of common feelings and appearances; and his three larger lyrics, of which the materials are drawn from civil and literary history.

It was objected by Johnson to the Prospect of Eton College, that "it suggested nothing to Gray which every beholder did not equally think and feel,"¹ and it has been repeated by critic after critic that no other poet has copied so much of his language from his predecessors. Familiar ideas and borrowed diction appear to exclude

¹ [*Lives of the Poets*, ed. Cunningham, vol. iii. p. 413.]

originality, and yet of what poem is the Ode on Eton College the echo, and where is the verse that is more individual than that of Gray? The assertion of Johnson is true, but what he urged as an objection to the piece is the very quality which has constituted its merit with the world at large. The things which stir mankind most deeply are of universal experience. To single out these moving topics, to clothe them in language which gives precision to the sentiment, and brings it back to the mind with the freshness of reality, to invest an old but touching thought with new beauty by the felicity of the phrases and the melody of the verse—this is the difficulty which few have overcome; this is the species of poetry of which the use and pleasure is most widely spread; and this it is which makes the glory and popularity of Gray.

The deep recesses of his heart
The common woes and joys conceal;
But genius owns the potent art
To speak what others only feel. /

That Gray embroidered his verse with expressions culled far and wide is equally certain, but the same charge may be brought against Milton, and the practice detracts little, if at all, from the merit of the author, and certainly nothing whatever from the gratification of the reader where the words are brought into new combinations in a way to produce a totally distinct effect. Many of the phrases which have been tracked to their source owe all their beauty to Gray's application of them, and many of the remaining expressions which have since passed into the language were entirely his own. It is curious to find him congratulating himself on the want of that verbal memory of which his works furnish such abundant evidence, and expressing a fear lest he should have been led, if he had possessed it, to imitate too much.¹

It required unusual judgment and self-denial to keep

¹ [Nicholls's Reminiscences, *Works*, vol. v. p. 42.]

above worn-out commonplaces in the Elegy, and the sentiments are less obvious than those of the Ode on Eton College, but still they are the same as must constantly have occurred to many moralizers besides Gray. The originality is in the mode in which the ideas are expressed, which was always, he said, the great point with him: "not meaning by expression the mere choice of words, but the whole dress, fashion, and arrangement of a thought."¹ The scene, the hour, the sentiments, and the metre are in perfect keeping, and combine to produce that harmony of gentle pathos which at once saddens and soothes. The idea of making a transition from the general reflections to himself was an unhappy after-thought, and all, from the line—

\ For thee, who, mindful of the unhonoured dead, /

up to the end, is of an inferior stamp. The language is of a magical beauty. Mr. Mitford has pointed out a few forced rhymes and faulty expressions, which cannot be defended;² and Goldsmith has complained that it is overloaded with epithets,³ which here and there is the case; but in general the descriptive force of the epithets is one of its conspicuous merits, for Gray had the faculty of hitting upon that word of the language which best defined his idea, and made it felt by the reader.

The poetry of Gray which treats of familiar subjects belongs to the first period of his English compositions. In them he drew from the spontaneous emotions of his heart, and the native melancholy, plaintive but not morbid, with which he coloured everything, is one of the causes of the hold which his pieces take on the mind. He there displays the real bent of his genius, which was rather tender than sublime. What Johnson said of his Pindaric

¹ [Sept. 28, 1757, *Correspondence of Gray and Mason*, p. 103.]

² [*Works*, vol. i. pp. cxi.-cxvi.]

³ [Goldsmith's *Notes on Beauties of English Poesy*, *Works*, vol. iii. p. 436.]

Odes—that they were forced plants raised in a hot-bed ;¹ and again, that Gray was tall by walking on tiptoe²—is not devoid of justice. This is now a more common opinion than it used to be formerly. “They are, I believe,” says Hazlitt, “generally given up at present: they are stately and pedantic, a kind of methodical, borrowed frenzy.”³ Sir Walter Scott thought them stiff and artificial, and Lord Byron considered that Gray’s reputation would have been higher if he had written nothing except his *Elegy*.⁴ To us it appears that his Odes, and especially the Bard, which is much the finest, contain delicious strains, but that taken as a whole they are not first-rate. The words and verse of the Progress of Poetry are glowing enough, but many of the ideas are frigid and far-fetched. The Bard is a grand conception, and has more vigour of sentiment than the companion Ode, but the dramatic energy, so conspicuous in the opening burst, is not well sustained. Whatever bears the marks of painful elaboration must be to some extent formal ; fervour is the impulse of the moment ; and in passages intended to be passionate, the smell of the lamp destroys the nature and mars the effect.

The language of his other pieces is rich, but not luxuriant ; in his Pindarics it is ornate to excess, and the metaphors and personifications, a few of which are superb, are sometimes pushed to the boundaries of extravagance, and even cross the confines. The praise of Shakespeare, which was a favourite passage with the author because he thought it had the merit of being original where novelty was hardly possible, is an instance of the defect. The picture of Nature presenting the pencil and keys to the child, and of his smiling at her awful face, is grotesque in

¹ [Boswell’s *Johnson*, p. 658.]

² [*Lives of the Poets*, vol. iii. p. 417.]

³ [*Lectures on the English Poets*, 3rd ed., p. 230.]

⁴ [Letter on Bowles’s *Strictures on Pope*, Moore’s *Life of Byron*, App., p. 696.]

proportion to the vividness with which it is realised, and is not redeemed by any ingenuity in the conception. The representation, too, of the mighty mother as wearing a terrible countenance, is peculiarly inapplicable to the universal genius of Shakespeare, whose comic powers are not inferior to his tragic. In the lines which follow on Milton, the ascribing his blindness to his contemplation of the dazzling glories of heaven, which he only viewed in imagination, is certainly a conceit, but there is a grandeur in the passage which even this blemish, serious as it is, could not destroy.

If Gray had been more sparing of his metaphors they would have gained in effect, and we should have had less of that obscurity, which it is idle to defend, and which, in the *Progress of Poetry*, is entirely produced by the resolution to tell everything in the high figurative style. He frequently fails to preserve consistency in his images. Dr. Akenside remarked that the keys in the panegyric on Shakespeare, which are employed at first to unlock a gate, are made at the end "to ope a *source*."¹ Dr. Johnson has exposed some similar slips,² and throughout Gray's poems there is often a want of coherence between the parts of a sentence, either of grammar or of sense. The fault arose from his mode of composition. Instead of putting down his thoughts as they sprung up in his mind, he polished every line as he proceeded, and in the repeated changes of expression, a later verse, which was correct in the first conception, came to harmonise imperfectly with what went before.

In the management of his metre Gray has no superior. His ear was exquisite, and the few harsh lines, and very harsh they are, which are to be found in his poetry, were evidently left because he preferred to sacrifice the melody to the expression. The greatness of his reputation, contrasted with the small extent of the compositions upon

¹ [Gray to Wharton, Sept. 7, 1757, *Works*, vol. iii. p. 169.]

² [*Lives of the Poets*, vol. iii. p. 414.]

which it is built, is the strongest proof of their singular excellence. Whether the slow and mosaic workmanship of Gray was an indication of genius, has often been questioned, but none except the few, who were jealous of his popularity, have ever hesitated to admit that his happiest poetry must be classed among the most perfect in the world. }

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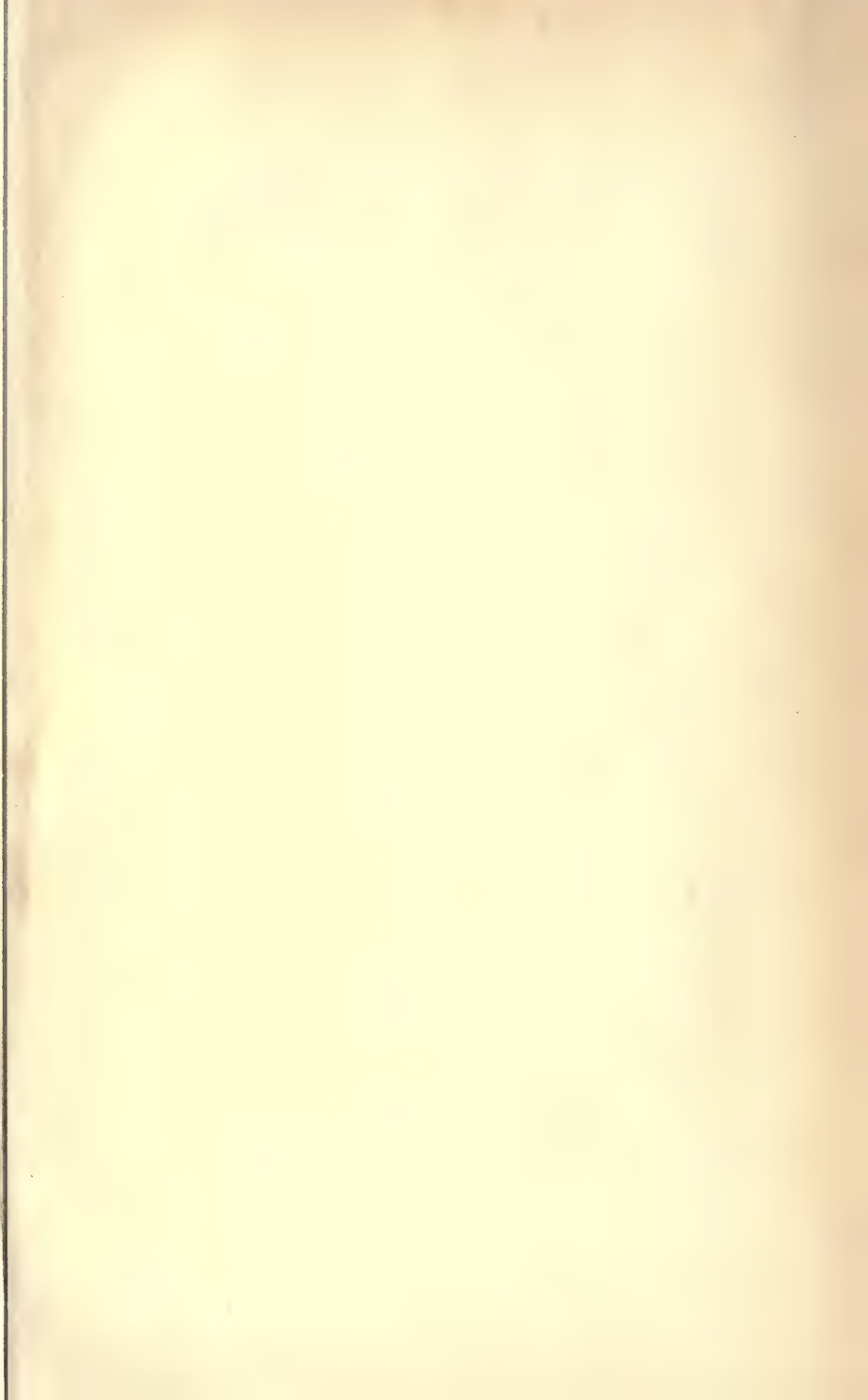
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